

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



October 2018

Vol. 123, No. 10

₹ 15.00

# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *How to Control Prana*

**P**rana means force—all that is manifesting itself as movement or possible movement, force, or attraction. Electricity, magnetism, all the movements in the body [and] mind, are various manifestations of one thing called Prana. The mind ought to control every bit of Prana of the body, [but] with most of us it is the other way. It is the body mastering the mind. We have becomes bodies. Here [comes] the philosopher to show us the way out, to teach us what we really are. You may reason it out and understand it intellectually, but there is a long way between intellectual understanding and the practical realization of it. Between the plan of the building and the building itself there is quite a long distance. Therefore there must be various methods [to reach the goal of religion]. A little physical help will make the mind comfortable. What would be more rational than to have the mind itself accomplish the thing. But it cannot. The physical help is necessary for most of us. The system of Raja-Yoga is to utilise these physical helps, to make use of the powers and forces in the body to produce certain mental states, to make the mind stronger and stronger until it regains its lost empire. By sheer force of will if anyone can attain to that, so much the better. But most of us cannot, so we will use physical means, and help the will on its way. The whole universe is a tremendous case of unity in variety. There is only one mass of mind. Different [states] of that mind have different names. [They are]



different little whirlpools in this ocean of mind. Matter cannot be said to cause force nor [can] force [be] the cause of matter. There must be a third [factor], and that third something is the mind. You cannot produce the universe from matter, neither from force. Mind is something [which is] neither force nor matter, yet begetting force and matter all the time. In the long run, mind is begetting all force, and that is what is meant by the universal mind, the sum total of all minds. Everyone is creating, and [in] the sum total of all these creations you have the universe—unity in diversity. It is one and it is many at the same time. The Personal God is only the sum total of all, and yet it is an individual by itself, just as you are the individual body of which each cell is an individual part itself. Everything that has motion is included in Prana or force. [It is] this Prana which is moving the stars, sun, moon; Prana is gravitation. All forces of nature, therefore, must be created by the universal mind. Control of this Prana that is working everything, control of this Prana in the body, is called Pranayama.

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**F**rom *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,  
(Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 1.487-90.

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Printed and Published by  
*Swami Vibhutmananda*

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Kolkata • 700 014  
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**INTERNET EDITION**

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**or AWAKENED INDIA**

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- It is a branch centre of Ramakrishna Math, Belur, West Bengal, near Kolkata.
- The centre has been entrusted with the publication and propagation of Ramakrishna Vivekananda and Vedanta literature.
- The editorial office of *Prabuddha Bharata*, a monthly English journal started in 1896, is located here.



### Mayavati Charitable Hospital

Apart from being a monastery and publication centre which was sanctified by the visit of Swami Vivekananda, this Ashrama runs a hospital called **Mayavati Charitable Hospital**. It made its humble beginning as a small dispensary way back in 1903 in response to the pressing needs of the neighbouring villages where live some of the **poorest people of our country**. Patients come here from distant places across hills and dales covering even a distance of 50 kms or more. Their helplessness at the time of sickness is really heart-rending.



We have been running a 25-bed hospital with outpatients' department in this remote place since 1943. Different types of treatment are done here **entirely free of charges**. Moreover, we arrange surgical, dental, urological, eye camps etc. throughout the year. Special health awareness camps are also conducted in many villages of the Kumaon region. Qualified doctors from different parts of India regularly visit our Charitable Hospital to conduct such medical camps. To cope with the steady rise in the number of patients, a five-storeyed building was built fitted with a few high quality diagnostic appliances. For this hospital, we need the following residential staff:

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Saturday, 17th November 2018

Ceremony Period : 16th, 17th and 18th November 2018

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Please contact your nearest ashrama or write to us on e-mail : rkmaurangabad@gmail.com. The enrolment of the devotees as 'Resident Delegate' is now discontinued.

Yours in the service of the Lord,

*Vishnupadananda*

**(Swami Vishnupadananda)**

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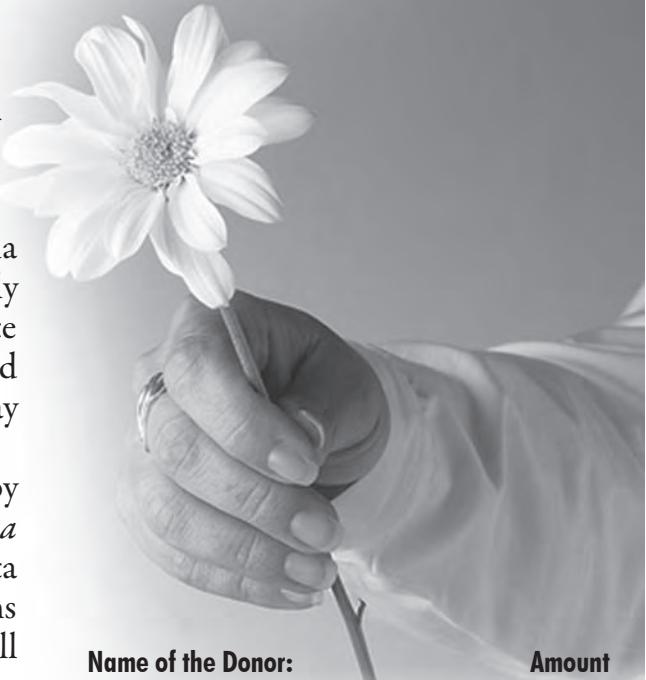
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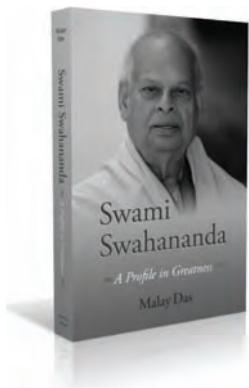


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### *A Profile in Greatness*

by Dr. Malay Das



Pages: 234 | Price: ₹ 80  
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The spiritual head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California for thirty-six years, Swami Swahananda, a direct disciple of Swami Vijnanananda, worked ceaselessly to spread Sri Ramakrishna's message. He established seventeen centers and sub-centers throughout the United States and has left the Ramakrishna movement in the West a rich legacy.

In this intimate, loving portrait, Dr. Malay Das presents Swami Swahananda as he knew him during the last seventeen years of the swami's life. We witness the guru's compassionate care for devotees and disciples, his ability to love with detachment, and his dignity and grace during his final illness.

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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

*Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

## Maitrayaniya Upanishad

October 2018  
Vol. 123, No. 10

### मैत्रायणीयोपनिषद्

अथान्यत्राप्युक्तं यदा वै बहिर्विद्वान् मनो नियम्येन्द्रियार्थश्च प्राणो निवेशयित्वा निःसङ्कल्पस्ततस्तिष्ठेदप्राणादिः  
स्मात् सम्भूतः प्राणसञ्ज्ञको जीवस्तस्मात् प्राणो वै तुर्याख्ये धारयेत् प्राणमित्येवं ह्याह ।

अचित्तं चित्तमध्यस्थमचिन्त्यं गुह्यमुत्तमं ।

तत्र चित्तं निधायेत तत्र लिङ्गं निराश्रयं ॥

॥ ६.१९ ॥

*Athany-atravy-uktam yada vai bahir-vidvan mano niyamyendriya-arthan-shcha prano  
niveshayitva nihsamkalpas-tatas-tishthet-apranad-iba yasmat sambhutah prana-samjnako jivas-  
tasmat prano vai turyakhye dharayet pranamityevam hyaha .*

*Achittam chittamadhyastham-achintyam guhyam-uttamam.*

*Tatra chittam nidhayeta tachcha lingam nirashrayam.*

(6.19)

And thus it has been said elsewhere: ‘Indeed, when a knower has restrained one’s mind from the external, when one’s breath has put to rest sense-objects, let that person then remain void of conceptions. Since the living individual who is named “prana” has arisen here from what is not prana. Therefore let prana merge its prana in what is called Turiya.’ For thus has been said: ‘That which is unthought, which stands in the midst of thought, the unthinkable, the hidden, the highest, let a person merge one’s thought there. Then will this living being be without support or attachment.’

(6.19)

# THIS MONTH

**D**EUCING A PLAUSIBLE conclusion from available facts is one of the foundational exercises of logic and has helped in the disciplines of science, philosophy, humanities, and criminology. Its relevance in spirituality cannot be overemphasised. This is discussed in **The Ultimate Deduction**.

Recently a member of the Sri Ramakrishna Monastery at Vedanta Society of Southern California in Trabuco Canyon, California, found a slim French volume, *Récits de ceux qui ont connu Rāmakṛishṇa; Memories of those who have known Sri Ramakrishna*, written by Revered Swami Siddheswarananda, the founder of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in Gretz, France. It contains memories of some of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Yogenananda, Trabuco Canyon Monastery, Vedanta Society of Southern California, presents the English translation in **Reminiscences of Some Direct Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna**.

Sri Ramakrishna's contribution to ethics may be interpreted as moral realism. Dr Rajkumar Modak, assistant professor of philosophy, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, West Bengal, attempts to explore this aspect in **The Moral Point of View of Sri Ramakrishna**.

The World's Parliament of Religions, 1893 at Chicago was recorded by many historians and has been analysed by many scholars since then to the present-day. Swami Narasimhananda, the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, traces such historical accounts and scholarly interventions in the second and concluding instalment of **Swami**

## Vivekananda and the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893: New Perspectives.

Meditations on the Upanishads are the class notes on the Upanishads given on Wednesday evenings by Revered Swami Shraddhananda, former Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of Sacramento, in 1979. These class notes were taken down in shorthand in 1979 by Cleo aka Satyamayi Anderson and were transcribed many years later with the help of others. The notes are not verbatim and have been edited by Lali Maly and the seventh and final instalment is being given in **Meditation on the Upanishads**.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Prana**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

The gift of food is a meritorious act of charity and produces great results. This is explored in the second and final instalment of the story **The Glory of the Gift of Food**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Arulneri Kathaigal*.

Matthew J Salganik, professor of sociology at Princeton University; affiliated with that university's Centre for Information Technology Policy and the Center for Statistics and Machine Learning; an avid researcher; and a writer in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, has written the book **Bit By Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

# The Ultimate Deduction

**Y**OU SEE SMOKE. OR YOUR SMOKE detector detects it. You infer fire. The smoke detector cannot, however it is configured to give an alarm and set fire-fighting controls into motion. You see clouds. You infer rain and try to reschedule your outdoor activities or take appropriate gear to protect you from rain. You get a good smell from the kitchen and get ready for a delicious meal. All this and countless other activities of living beings in general and the human beings in particular are determined by our ability to deduce from a set of perceptions acquired through our sense organs. Without deduction, the perception or information acquired by the sense organs is meaningless and of no use. No information is useful unless it is put in some relation or perspective to us. That is why deduction becomes quite important in our lives.

What exactly is deduction? Deduction or deductive reasoning is inferring something from information that is available at a particular point in time. If the inference is made from memory, that would not be deductive reasoning. Logic or reasoning relies heavily on deductive reasoning though that is not the only method available. Most research in the fields of science, social sciences, and other fields use deductive reasoning to arrive at a conclusion based on available data. Recent studies show that language is integral to deductive reasoning. Such reasoning is critical in medical research, where deductive reasoning is used along with inductive reasoning. In inductive reasoning all the available data is considered to provide some evidence for the truth

of a conclusion, which is not considered definite, but only probable.

Sri Ramakrishna was an expert at deduction.

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### We need to hone our skills of deducing the Real from the apparent.

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He could see through the visage of behaviours, mannerisms, and other facades and dissect the nature of a person. Most attribute these abilities to his being an incarnation of God. While one cannot deny the effect of being an incarnation, reading Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings carefully, one understands that he also had an expert observational skill. Also, if being an incarnation of God was the only reason for this deductive skill, why is it not seen in other incarnations of God? We can safely conclude that Sri Ramakrishna was showing humanity a path to deduce from given facts, to fast arrive at conclusions regarding the truth of one's self, this universe, and God. As he used to say, this age does not permit one to do severe austerities, as one's body is completely dependent on food. Probably that was why, he showed us a path of discerning truths by not merely developing one's intellect, but by sharpening one's insight using the instinct of perception that our senses possess.

When Sri Ramakrishna refused to get a bread-winning education, it was not only his devotion to God that prevented him from getting himself formally schooled, it was also the penetrating insight or the sharp deduction that after all, what that kind of education gave was only 'plantain

and rice'. He could see the changed manner of greeting by a person and immediately deduce that that person had acquired some newfound wealth. He could observe the gait of a person and accurately discern what the person did for a living. It is interesting to note here that a great hero of deduction in the public eye was born just after the end of Sri Ramakrishna's advent on earth. Yes, the reference is to the famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The first story featuring Sherlock Holmes, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published in 1887, a year after Sri Ramakrishna's passing. However, the religious and spiritual world had already found a much subtle and exponential form of Holmesian deduction in Sri Ramakrishna. While Sherlock Holmes could only deduce from the apparent, however hidden it was, Sri Ramakrishna deduced the non-apparent or real, howsoever much the apparent came in the way. To look at a lion and make the connection that it is the Divine Mother's vehicle is easy for anyone who knows this fact. However, to take this deduction and connection to an experiential level and realise the form of Divine Mother in one's mind and go into samadhi was possible only for Sri Ramakrishna, whose deduction was not merely for arriving at connections or conclusions, but experiencing them. His psychology and neurology were intertwined with his philosophical and spiritual convictions. While we see only passively through our senses, Sri Ramakrishna actively deduced and experienced through his senses and mind.

The spiritual history of the world has many examples of saints, prophets, incarnations using deductive reasoning to arrive at the unreality of this universe. Though they might not have used deduction to arrive at conclusions about earthly realities, as Sri Ramakrishna uniquely did, almost every faith-tradition, encourages contemplation that leads to reasoning, called *vichara* or *viveka*.

in Sanskrit. Sri Ramakrishna did not leave any aspect of spiritual life outside the ambit of deduction. When praying to the goddess Kali at Dakshineswar, for days, he tested whether the image of Kali was conscious by touching the image and looking for signs of breathing. He concluded that the image was conscious only when he could feel the goddess's skin and her breath.

When Gautama Buddha encountered the hard realities of life, just by observation and not by personal experience—as his king father had insulated him from the vagaries of the world—he did a masterly act of deduction in concluding that the miseries of sickness, old age, and death confront everyone and that there is a path out of these miseries available for anyone to take. He immediately left his hearth and home, practised severe austerities, learnt his lessons, and finally attained enlightenment, which he then proclaimed to humanity. The Upanishads show the path of deductive reasoning over and again and show that through deduction, one can understand the ephemeral nature of the body, mind, senses, and the universe in general. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, the father of Shvetaketu helps him do a classic case of deduction. He asks Shvetaketu to go without food for a fortnight and when Shvetaketu is unable to think at the end of the fortnight, his father shows him that it is quite easy to infer that the mind is made up of matter, food in this case.

All spiritual aspirants need to hone their skills of spiritual deduction, inferring from the apparent the truth about the Real. We should be able to infer from this universe, not only its transitory nature, but also its substratum, Brahman. Then, we would be able to unravel the mysterious case of our true nature. As all spiritual teachers have said, this is quite simple but requires tremendous patience and perseverance. As Sherlock Holmes would say: 'Elementary'!

# **Reminiscences of Some Direct Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna**

**Swami Siddheswarananda**

**Translated from the French Original by Swami Yogeshananda**

[New discoveries can be made in various ways: old libraries can turn them up. This was proven recently when a member of the Sri Ramakrishna Monastery at Vedanta Society of Southern California in Trabuco Canyon, California, brought to me a slim volume written in French, and asked what it was. It proved to be *Récits de ceux qui ont connu Rāmakrishna*; Memories of those who have known Sri Ramakrishna, published by the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna, Gretz, France, in 1960, three years after the passing of Swami Siddheswarananda. It was made up of two sections: the first, a summary of the Vedanta Philosophy obviously penned by Swami Siddheswarananda; the second, memories of some of the First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna by their disciples. It is this last that is of much interest to us here. At first glance these appeared to be familiar enough; but as the translation went on, surprising new dialogue appeared: these were different versions of some familiar accounts. In part the language was strikingly new. We present them here, convinced that readers will appreciate them and understand their genuineness.—Swami Yogeshananda]

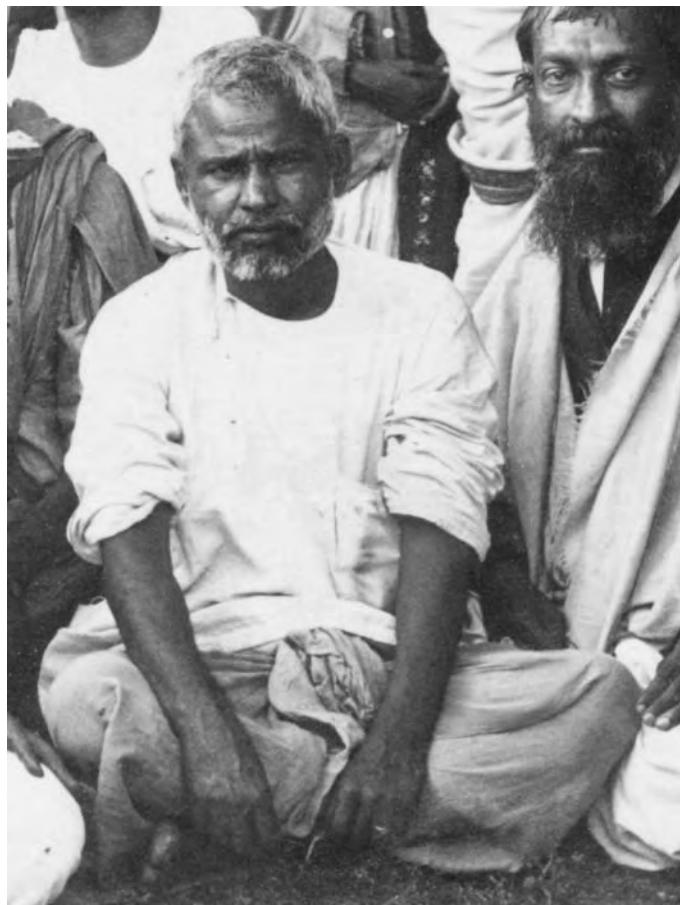
**O**NE DAY, Swami Shivananda was asked whether Sri Ramakrishna gave initiation. He replied:

Yes, but very rarely and never in the manner of an ordinary guru who whispers the mantra into the ear of the disciple. He raised to spirituality the awareness of one who came to him, sometimes by a touch, sometimes by writing with his finger a mantra on the tongue, thereby transforming totally the personality of the disciple

by the mere power of his will. It is in the heart of the disciple that he placed the mantra. He raised the spiritual level of those who came to him, awakening in them the Divine by means of disciplines that varied according to the nature

*Swami Siddheswarananda (1897–1957)*





*Swami Adbhutananda (d. 1920)*

of the person. Whatever the way that was followed, one was sure to receive the efficacious help of Sri Ramakrishna.

### ***Sri Ramakrishna and Latu (Swami Adbhutananda)***

Latu had held for a long time the desire to go on a pilgrimage. He had not spoken of it to anyone, but Sri Ramakrishna, who had understood his thoughts, said to him one day: 'Where will you go? You should not cherish these ideas of vagabondage. Here at least you have the opportunity to have, every day, the food that has been offered to the Mother. Outside, you will have to get your food by begging. Anyway, if you

absolutely must go elsewhere, go to Calcutta to the house of Ram Babu.'

Latu departed but he did not go to Calcutta. He did not find the freedom that he enjoyed in the company of Sri Ramakrishna and, at the end of three days, he returned to Dakshineswar. A short time later the desire to go on a pilgrimage came back to him strongly. Sri Ramakrishna, smiling, said to him: 'You have been here a long time; after all; that can only make you eager to live somewhere else for some time.'

Latu was delighted to have obtained in this way permission to leave without having to ask for it. But where to go? As he was not able to decide himself he spoke about it to Sri Ramakrishna, who told him: 'Why don't you go to Antpur, the village of Baburam (later Swami Premananda)? He is there at this time and you will have no problem about anything.'

Latu then went to Antpur where he stayed for ten days. Baburam Maharaj has himself told us of this visit:

When Latu came to our village he began by telling me that the place did not suit him. My mother, seeing his look of sadness, asked me what might be the reason. The answer was simple and he told it to me as soon as I asked: The Master was not there. One day he burst into sobs and declared, 'Tomorrow, I go back to Dakshineswar.' Seeing his tears, my mother naturally made no objection to his leaving. When he arrived at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna said to him, 'You have been there already? You have come back so quickly?' 'I felt that I couldn't stay there,' Latu replied in a most respectful tone. Sri Ramakrishna: 'What is it that keeps you from staying there? It is an especially agreeable place.'

Latu: 'I know. I was sad not to be seeing you anymore and nothing could satisfy me. I have the impression of having a completely empty head and it has even become impossible for me to do japa.' Sri Ramakrishna appeared

surprised: 'This is the first time I am hearing of such a thing. Formerly you could not concentrate your mind and here now you are capable of doing it! God is only here and not there? But, if you repeat the name of the Lord you will be able to meditate on Him in whatever place you find yourself.'

Latu: 'But you were not there.'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'So, when I am not there, can't you concentrate your mind or do japa? All right, don't be so sad. From now on, I will be with you always.'

Latu could not restrain his emotion. He blubbered: 'Without you my life will be lost. Pray that I may constantly feel your presence.'

Sri Ramakrishna said, smiling, 'See how he speaks!' Then, seeing Latu crying, he said to him, cheerfully: 'No, I will never abandon you. Have no more anxiety.'

In 1882, for the first time, the anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna's birth was celebrated at Dakshineswar. The principal part of the expense was assumed by Suresh Mitra and Dr Ramchandra Datta. Latu, busy with preparing the food and serving it to everyone who had come, didn't have an instant of rest that day. As he had started to work from dawn, he wanted to rest a little in the afternoon, but Manomohan Babu gave him an extra task that he accomplished with a very depressed face. Then Sri Ramakrishna asked him to go to Calcutta to see a devotee who had not been able to come and to whom he wanted to send a little prasad. Latu obeyed but he was so tired, so discouraged, that he passed the night at the house of that devotee, instead of returning to Dakshineswar. The next morning, on his way back, he stopped at Naren's (later Swami Vivekananda) house. The latter asked him: 'What are you doing here so early? And what is the news from there?'

Latu: 'There was a great feast for his birthday.

Why didn't you come? Several times during the day he asked for you. Come with me now, today. He has such a strong desire to see you.'

'No, I cannot go there at this time. The date of my examinations is coming and I haven't got time to lose with this fool of a brahmin.'

'How can you talk that way?!' Latu exclaimed. 'You know how far away he is from being a fool. I do not know of anyone so well balanced as he is.'

Naren replied with a sarcastic smile: 'Oh yes. You can talk about his balance. Sometimes he doesn't even know that his cloth is falling off his shoulders and when he hears the name of the Lord, he begins to jump and dance like a fool. No, really, he has no decency. He is capable of going completely nude, no matter where. And then, I am persuaded that he gives himself to magic practices. He casts spells on others and what more, I don't know.' (Changing suddenly to a tone of respect): 'You are with him day and night. Can you tell me, is he always absorbed in the same state of consciousness? Does he pass his nights without sleep?'

Latu: 'Yes, I see him all the time and I have never seen him behave in an indecent way. As for the other, I've never seen him cast a spell on anybody. If anybody has claimed that, they're out of their mind. And you are the only one who calls him "that mad Brahmin". Many respectable people come just to see him. The other day Keshab Babu came to visit him with Mr Cook, and they spent several hours together.'

Naren: 'What did they talk about?'

Latu: 'That day there was a lot of talk about meditation and the knowledge of God. In the course of the conversation he highly praised you to Keshab Babu.'

Naren: 'Does Rakhal come there very often?'

Latu: 'Yes, he comes and even stays for a day or two. The Master loves him very much. He makes him sit by his side. He gives him full

attention and serves him food as if he were his own son. When he took Rakhal to the Holy Mother he said to her, "You see, your son has come! Take good care of him, I ask of you." You cannot imagine the joy that she felt at that. She prepared all sorts of treats for us that day.'

Naren: 'Did he say to her that Rakhal was her child?'

Latu: 'Exactly, I was with them when he said it.'

The anecdote which follows shows us how Latu Maharaj, in the company of Sri Ramakrishna, learned to overcome his natural impetuosity.

One day, after the midday meal, Sri Ramakrishna asked Rakhal to prepare a paan, betel nut roll, for him.

Sri Ramakrishna said: 'If there is no paan ready, you can prepare one.'

'I don't know how to do that,' replied Rakhal.

'What? Don't you know? How is it that you don't know? But it is not at all difficult. You don't have to read books in order to make a paan. Go on, find one for me.'

But Rakhal did not budge. Latu seemed very shocked by Rakhal's attitude, but the latter didn't pay any attention to his reproof and began to talk to somebody else. This was too much for Latu, who began to reproach him violently in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna.

'You should be ashamed of yourself, Rakhal Babu! Not only are you not obeying him, but you also showed disrespect by beginning to speak of something else. Truly, I would never have believed that you could behave this way.'

Rakhal, bored by these rebukes, replied to Latu: 'Then go and prepare it yourself, this paan! As for me, I don't know, I have never done it. And today is not the day that I'm going to begin.'

This reply was too much for Latu; he began to speak half in Hindi, half in Bengali, which was, for him, the sign of great anger. Sri Ramakrishna, very amused at this scene, called his nephew

Ramlal: 'Come quick, Ramlal, hurry up! There is a dispute between Rakhal and Latu!'

Ramlal arrived quickly. Sri Ramakrishna asked him: 'In your opinion, who is the better disciple, Rakhal or Latu?'

Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, Ramlal, joining in the fun, replied smiling, 'I truly believe that it is Rakhal.'

Latu, carried away with anger, cried out: 'Is that so?! He has disobeyed the Master and now he is a great bhakta!'

Seeing the fury of Latu, Sri Ramakrishna continued to laugh and said to Ramlal: 'Yes, you are right. Rakhal is the better disciple. See how he (Rakhal) smiles, even while he (pointing to Latu) has become mad with rage? How can one who has great devotion to God get into a rage in front of this (indicating himself)? Anger is lowbrow; when it prevails, faith, devotion, and all the other virtues are shoved aside.'

At these words, the anger of Latu fell away and his embarrassment was extreme. Tears in his eyes, he could not contain the feelings of shame which now upset him and he said: 'Never again will I become angry in front of you. I beg you to forgive me.'

Cheerfully Sri Ramakrishna said: 'After all, Rakhal was right. The body was wishing for a paan and Rakhal did well not to be disturbed: but, if he who lives in this body, had truly a need for a paan, do you think that Rakhal would have been able to refuse Him?'

### ***Memories of Swami Vijnanananda***

When I was at the Madras monastery I had heard about Sri Vijnan Maharaj (Swami Vijnanananda), that his devotion was as remarkable as that of Sri Shashi Maharaj (Swami Ramakrishnananda). In 1922 I was sent to the monastery at Belur. Young monk that I was then, and coming from the south of India, not yet

knowing very much Bengali, I waited impatiently for an opportunity to listen to Sri Vijnan Maharaj tell his memories of Sri Ramakrishna. Soon I had the opportunity when he spoke directly to me.

After the evening service, as I found myself seated next to Swami Vijnanananda, I asked him to tell us something of his memories. I did not know that this was a brash question. Had I not seen Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) many times remain grave and silent when we tried to get him to talk about Sri Ramakrishna? We had to wait for the favourable moment when he felt like bringing up past years with his Master; at that time, he would speak to us without being asked. Likewise, it was not any easier to persuade Sri Vijnan Maharaj to satisfy our curiosity; I had already tried several times uselessly. That evening, however, he was quite willing to grant my wish. I asked him: 'Maharaj, would you be so kind as to talk about Sri Ramakrishna?'

He answered me after some silence: 'I'm going to ask you a question: How do you think of Sri Ramakrishna?'

'I think he is a Divine Incarnation,' I said to him.

Swami Vijnanananda: 'My poor boy, is that all that you think of him? So, don't you see that it is he who sends the incarnations? That he is the Divine Mother herself?'

Seeing me embarrassed, he did not ask me any other questions. He told us the following memory:

One day when I went to Dakshineswar, I saw him walking back and forth in the veranda. He had a very happy air and when he saw me, he imitated the gestures of a wrestler and asked me, 'Do you want to wrestle a little with me?' I too felt playful, but at the same time I said to myself, 'How puny he looks and I am so big and strong, while he is so tiny and fragile!' I went forward towards him and in a few movements I had him on the ground, thus assuring the victory.



*Swami Vijnanananda (1868–1938)*

Swami Vijnanananda changed the subject and his face grew grave. The atmosphere created by this silence was extraordinary. Only those who have been in contact with great spiritual personalities can understand the power of such a silence.

I had the impression that he was about to speak again. The young monk who was dedicated to his service signaled to me, however, not to ask any more questions at the moment. Several minutes went by in this way.

Then Sri Vijnan Maharaj turned toward me and asked me, 'In your opinion, who won this fight?'

Me: 'You won, Maharaj. There isn't any doubt about that.'

Swami Vijnanananda: 'Idiot! You haven't

understood anything. It is *he* who conquered me.”

Me: ‘How is that, Maharaj?’

Swami Vijnanananda said, ‘Do you not see, then, that I have become his slave? When I fought with him, he took into himself all my strength.’

Then, in a few words, he taught us how we should do japa: ‘When you repeat his name, imagine that you are grappling with him as I have just done. Let all your strength be absorbed in his name. It is in this way that he will grasp you and there will no more be you, but he, your Master.’

According to the Indian belief, there is no difference between the Lord and his name, and the power of the divine name can overcome the influences of maya and *avidya*, ignorance. We suppose that it is we who act, but grace can dispel that illusion. What do we notice, ordinarily, in the course of our spiritual practices? That we are lacking in love, in faith, or even in the simple faculty of concentration. Under such circumstances, we don’t make any progress. Many thoughts, like parasites, impose themselves upon us. We observe in ourselves the simultaneous presence of two lines of thought: on one side, that of the Lord, flickering like the light of a candle and on the other hand, a prodigious abundance of thoughts which bring us back to the things of the world. These two lines never meet. We must pit the thought of the Lord, completely concentrated on his name, against the vagaries of our mind. It matters little if one side seems inadequate and if the influence of God appears too feeble in us compared to what is resisting him. Let us enter into the Divine play that Sri Ramakrishna had offered to Sri Vijnan Maharaj. The Lord, in struggling against our wayward thoughts is going to bring together in him their scattered forces and absorb their energy just as he, from that moment, lives in us.

### **Memories of Swami Akhandananda**

Swami Akhandananda said:

My first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna took place in 1883 when I was sixteen years old. At that time, I was very observing of Brahminic orthodoxy and scrupulously followed the customs and rites prescribed by the scriptures. I regularly practised breathing exercises before meditating; they made me feel stronger so I would increase the number every day. It sometimes happened that my breath stopped for such a long time that I perspired, and my body would shake.

When I spoke of these exercises to Sri Ramakrishna he firmly forbade me to pursue them and warned me that such practices could provoke dangerous troubles. He told me to repeat the Gayatri mantra. ‘Say it as often as you can’, he advised me. Sri Ramakrishna talked to me about Naren.

‘He has huge eyes’, he told me, ‘that are always looking inward. When he walks in the streets, all that he sees—houses, carriages, horses—all become, for him, Lord Narayana. Go and see him on my behalf; he lives in Calcutta, in the Simla District.’

The next day I went to pay a visit to Naren in his father’s house. When I went back to Sri Ramakrishna, he asked me right away, ‘Did you go and see Naren?’

‘Yes’, I replied; ‘and I spoke to him about our meeting. I marvelled at his large eyes and the intensity of his look. He was reading an English book as big as Webster’s dictionary; it was a biography of Buddha. His room was full of dust that he appeared not to notice nor even see. One might say that his mind belonged to another world.’ Sri Ramakrishna seemed very happy to hear this account.

‘You noticed all that during the short time that you were with him!’, he said, ‘Go and see him often; seek his company every time you have a chance.’

After the death of his father, Naren did

not come to Dakshineswar for a long time. Sri Ramakrishna, full of anxiety, often asked for news of him and sent various people to find him. Naren, who was having serious preoccupation with financial problems, no doubt wished to avoid speaking to Sri Ramakrishna. As soon as his situation improved a little, he returned to Dakshineswar and, subsequently, every time I went there, Naren was there.

A visitor asked Sri Ramakrishna one day, 'Revered Sir, your young disciples are showing no interest at all in family life. They all want to become monks. Do you think that is normal?'

'You don't see the tendencies which are in them in this life,' replied Sri Ramakrishna, 'and you do not know their past lives in the course of which they were heads of families. Otherwise, how to explain that sometimes someone produced in a family, a son, having become a young man, says to his parents, "From now on, I will not use oil in my bath, I will not eat fish, and I will be satisfied with one vegetable meal which I prepare myself"?

'The family does everything that it can to dissuade him, they even threaten him with a severe chastising, but nothing can make him give up his attitude of renunciation. However, the other children eat everything given them and are inclined towards worldly pleasures. The more they have of them, the stronger is their desire to possess more: they are insatiable. But their brother has already chosen the monastic life. Why? Because efforts made in previous incarnations have borne their fruits and this boy now has a *sattvic* nature, calm and pure.'

'Tuesdays and Saturdays are the days auspicious for spiritual life. In this Kaliyuga, this iron age, one should follow the path of devotion



Swami Akhandananda (1864–1937)

taught by Narada.' He also advised us to practise meditation on those two days of the week.

No matter what kind of people were present, Sri Ramakrishna spoke only of God and spiritual subjects: this was one of the remarkable habits of his nature. But the conversation never became monotonous. Even when it was a matter of important questions, he often illustrated his teaching, amusing the listeners. For example, he said: 'How do you recognize a perfect sage, a *siddha*? You know the meaning of the word 'siddha'; taken literally, it means 'boiled'. After being put into boiling water, potatoes become soft. It is the same with men who have achieved perfection.'





## ***The Moral Point of View of Sri Ramakrishna***

**Dr Rajkumar Modak**

his contribution may be interpreted as moral realism, because for him the criterion of morality is based on those events which are very common, simple, and related with everyday life. This paper is an attempt to explore this aspect.

To be a true religious person, it is obvious, one must follow some religious beliefs, but this does not imply that one has to adhere exclusively to a particular set of religious beliefs. If someone sticks on exclusively to a particular set of religious beliefs, it is doubtful, whether the particular person is 'a truly religious person' or not, that is, such a person may be regarded as 'a truly religious bigot'. The following are the qualities of 'a truly religious person':

(i) must have a firm conviction and commitment to a particular religion;

(ii) must be aware of different religions;

(iii) must be prepared to allow at least in theory that one might be wrong in believing certain particular religious propositions about which one has firm belief, whatever may be the reason; and

(iv) must be moral.

On the other hand, 'a truly religious bigot' has a confirmed belief in a particular religion and at the same time is bigoted so much in one's belief, thinks like a dogmatist, is cocksure of everything even if it might be wrong or false. Such a person always denies one's limitations and acts as if one knows everything.

'The breeze of His [God's] grace is blowing day and night over your head. Unfurl the sails'—  
Sri Ramakrishna.<sup>1</sup>

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was neither a philosopher nor a moralist in the conventional sense. Actually, he was a life-moral-philosopher which means his life itself was the model of a moral philosopher. Being an extraordinary saint he could speak with the goddess Kali.<sup>2</sup> He had the power to make a simple explanation for a long pending crucial and inscrutable philosophical problem with the help of most ordinary similes from day-to-day life. Now, the time has come to investigate the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna from different angles. Regarding ethics,

Again, to be moral is one of the essential qualities of ‘a truly religious person’; otherwise it may seem that ‘a truly religious person’ may ignore one’s moral duties. In this context, the question, ‘How does “a truly religious person” keep one’s moral duties?’, can be taken as the million-dollar question as it is very difficult for a person to be truly religious and moral at the same time. The answer of this question has been found in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, who was neither a philosopher in the usual sense or a highly educated person in a literal sense. Moreover, he was not a wise man from an Aristotelian point of view.

Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, Book 1, makes a distinction between knowledge and wisdom. According to him, knowledge is concerned with a particular science which is correlated with its result; wisdom on the other hand, is concerned with that kind of science which is desirable in itself and for the sake of knowledge instead of its results. Persons who are the owner of such kind of wisdom are called wise. Furthermore, Aristotle characterises a wise person as one who (i) knows all things, so far as it is possible, without having the knowledge of every one of them individually; (ii) can comprehend difficult things, such as are not easy for human understanding; (iii) is wiser in proportion in every branch of knowledge as such a person is more accurately informed and better able to expound the causes; and (iv) should give orders, not receive them; nor should such a person obey others, but the less wise should obey such person.

Sri Ramakrishna was undoubtedly not a wise man in the above mentioned sense. But he was a virtuous person who acquired all the wisdom which was scattered in the shastras through self-realisation. He realised Brahman in a practical sense. He advised everyone to worship *jivas*, the individual beings, as if they are God and this is

the only way for the attainment of liberation. Being an extraordinary saint he could speak with the goddess Kali. He had the power to make a simple explanation for a long pending crucial and inscrutable philosophical problem with the help of most ordinary similes from everyday life. The following quotation from Swami Bhashyananda is relevant here.

He had a vision of Kali, the Divine Mother, Krishna, Rama, Shiva, and also experienced the higher non-dualistic state of oneness with the Ultimate Reality (Brahman). This is the culmination of man’s spiritual endeavour. He also practised the principles of Christianity and Islam and arrived at the same conclusion. All His visions of the personal God finally led to the experience of the Impersonal Brahman. This Impersonal Spirit is the basis of harmony of religions, He taught. A worshipper of the personal God can show respect to other faiths. That all religions ultimately lead sincere aspirants to the same goal of Pure Spirit, he demonstrated through his personal life. A circle may have many points, but all radii ultimately end with the centre. This is Sri Ramakrishna’s contribution to the realm of religion.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the discussion mentioned above, how does a person become ‘a truly religious person’ is not the focal point of this paper. As Sri Ramakrishna was undoubtedly ‘a truly religious person’, he not only performed his moral duties but also introduced a unique moral standard of justification through his ethical teachings which can be treated as a form of moral realism<sup>4</sup> from the Western modern moral philosophical perspective and this is the main point of this paper. Although, moral realism is a form of meta-ethical theory that is concerned with the justification of moral value judgements and as well as the ground of morality, this paper will be an exposition of how moral realism from the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna could be established in

a different way. In order to fulfil the aim of this paper, let us peep very briefly into the other theories which are concerned with the justification of moral value judgements and also look into the ground of morality in Western ethics.

According to ethical naturalism, moral value(s) judgements can be justified through a factual method<sup>5</sup> which is parallel to the method of historical and scientific justification. This is the only way to save morality from arbitrariness and relativism. For example, if someone asserts that freedom of the press is good, this claim can be justified by showing that a free press is desired by the majority in the culture in question, so it is good.

But, G E Moore, in his famous book, *Principia Ethica* raised two major objections to refute ethical naturalism. One is known as the naturalistic fallacy<sup>6</sup> and the other is the open question test (21). For Moore, good is indefinable. A definition for him is an analysis of that which a word stands for. To analyse is to break it down into its component parts. 'Good' is not analysable into its component parts. That is why the definition of 'good' is impossible. Any analysis of 'good' with the help of the properties which are other than good, leads one to commit the naturalistic fallacy. On the other hand, if it is said that 'good' simply means 'desired', one can always ask meaningfully 'But is it good?'. Here, the 'open question test' is applied. So, 'good' is indefinable.

Moore's contention regarding 'good' is that it is a unique property. What can be said about 'good' is this: 'good' refers to 'goodness', which is an ultimate, unobservable, and un-analysable property. Moral value judgements can be justified as true or false by intuition or self evidence. So, for Moore, intuition is the ground of morality.

But an appeal to an intuition is nothing but an appeal to individual opinion. An opinion

always has a need for justification which on the intuitionist scheme no one provides. In many occasions, moral disagreements are to be settled. But moral discourse is significant, if it is objectively a true or false assertion. Moore's intuitionism does not provide any justification for moral assertion as intuition can never be objectively true or false.

That is why; the emotivists, on the other hand, claim that moral utterances are like ejaculations.<sup>7</sup> These simply display our emotions and for them, emotion should be the ground of morality. In the judgement, 'One ought to help his neighbours', our feelings of approval or disapproval are expressed, but such judgements are not true or false.

But emotivism is rejected on the ground that, if emotions and personal attitudes are the source of moral values, then it is doubtful, if reason has any role to play in moral inquiry, justification and moral value judgements are not free from arbitrariness.

Prescriptivists hold that when we say that something is right or that something ought to be the case, or that something is good, our statement either is a sort of imperative, or entails an imperative. This imperatival element ensures that such evaluative language is genuinely prescriptive. Such language can be used to guide choices, because it involves an imperative. An imperative can be used to tell someone how to choose.

But there is a problem concerning the last sentence of the above paragraph. If someone asks about the criteria for buying an antique chair through the process of an auction, then being an antique commodities buyer, the command would be to choose ugly, rickety, old chairs rather than to choose a beautiful chair. This is because if everyone else is motivated to choose the good chairs, then bidding on the antique chair, which I want to buy, would be very intense, the

price will shoot up, and I won't be able to buy it. So, prescriptivism is also likely to fail.<sup>8</sup>

So, it is observed that none of the above theories can be considered as perfect. Now, let us make an analysis of a proposed theory which is named as moral realism from the perspective of Sri Ramakrishna. It has been mentioned earlier that he had the power to solve a long pending crucial and inscrutable philosophical problem, including moral problems, with the help of most ordinary similes from day-to-day life. Here, the term realism is used not to indicate that morality is based on facts, but to indicate that morality is based on practice. The justification of morality must be grounded on an experienced life. Teachings from the life of a virtuous person should be considered.

At the outset, before explaining moral realism from the perspective of Sri Ramakrishna, we must keep in mind that any ethical theory, whatever it may be, must have an ontological basis. The said theory of Sri Ramakrishna has a strong ontological basis. Again, an ethical theory consists of three parts, practical, theoretical, and ontological. Practical and theoretical parts of an ethical theory are visible parts that may be comparable just like the visible portion of an iceberg. The ontological part, on the other hand, is an invisible part which is huge, fundamental, and this part may be called as apriority part. Furthermore, the activeness of an ethical theory depends on the power of its ontological part.

The ontological part of the ethical realism of Sri Ramakrishna was Vedanta and he was able to make it according to the spirit of age through his spiritual practices. Vedanta postulates that Brahman is the only reality; the world is ultimately false; and the individual souls are no different from Brahman. The individual souls are the modifications of this sole reality. From this one should not conclude that there is no influence of Vedanta in our practical life. Sri Ramakrishna

believed and proved that the teachings of Vedanta directly influenced the moral life of an individual. Through his life, he taught that the reality of Brahman and the unreality of this universe was actually the demonstration of the ethics of love and universal brotherhood; because the individual being was ready to cultivate the spirit of non-difference.

The Advaitins maintain the identity of the individual soul with Brahman simply on the basis of the statements of the Upanishads. It is true that the literal meaning of *tat* significantly differs from that of *tvam* in the Upanishadic statement, '*Tat tvam asi; you are that.*'<sup>9</sup> The former denotes the meaning of consciousness characterised by indirectness and infiniteness. The latter, on the other hand, characterises the meaning of consciousness by directness and finiteness. As the concept of indirectness-directness, and infiniteness and finiteness are opposed to each other, the identity of the individual soul with Brahman can never be literally achieved only with the help of the Upanishadic statements. It is the secondary meaning in accordance with the intention of the speaker that helps us to understand the intentional meaning of the Upanishadic statement to establish the identity of the individual soul with Brahman.

Acharya Shankara held that ignorance is the cause of bondage. For one who is in ignorance and bondage, self purification and self-enlightenment are necessary to attain moksha. Through self purification and self-enlightenment one can obtain perfect knowledge that nothing but Brahman is free from the negation of "all three times" (it never was there, is not there, will not be there)<sup>10</sup> and the individual soul is identical with Brahman.

One may ask Acharya Shankara, if the individual is the modification of this sole reality, Brahman, then why and where is the necessity for work and effort? The answer to this question

lies in the fact that although human beings are lit with the divine spark, they are not wholly divine. We have the potentiality to be divine not in actual form but in suppressed form. Even for one who has obtained perfect knowledge or liberation, selfless work is necessary for the good of those who are still in bondage. The life of a liberated person should be worthy of imitation by the people at large. Inactivity or activity that would mislead them should be avoided by such a person. Acharya Shankara gives a great importance to disinterested works that may be connected with social service. Social service is not, therefore thought by Acharya Shankara to be incompatible with perfect life, but rather desirable.

Here, Sri Ramakrishna differs from Acharya Shankara. He shows us how karma in our day-to-day life can lead us to attain liberation. As the ideal is different from fact and it is indeed higher than fact itself, it is much difficult to implement the ideal in our daily life. Admitting this and declaring that pure Advaita cannot be forced on everyone, Sri Ramakrishna empathetically states repeatedly that Vedanta does not set any impossible task before us. Theory and practice must go hand to hand. For him, service to humanity in the spirit of divinity is the mantra of work and this is possible only when one visualises Brahman in all the human and even sub-human beings.

Those who visualise Brahman in all the human and even sub-human beings are virtuous and liberated persons, and they show others the way of liberation. In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sri Ramakrsihna clearly explained the essential characteristics of a virtuous person with the help of similes. He said: 'When you plunge in the water of the ocean, you may be attacked by alligators. But they won't touch you if your body is smeared with turmeric. There are no doubt six alligators—lust, anger, avarice, and

so on—within you, in the "heart's fathomless depths". But protect yourself with the turmeric of discrimination and renunciation, and they won't touch you.'<sup>11</sup> We have to dive into the sea, having rubbed our body with turmeric. He further added: 'After the realization of God one obtains an inner vision. Only then can one diagnose a person's spiritual malady and give instruction. Without the commission from God, a man becomes vain. He says to himself, "I am teaching people". This vanity comes from ignorance' (142). A person would be regarded as truly religious and/or virtuous and permitted to deliver religious and/or moral speeches only when such a person has installed God in the temple of one's heart. Without installing God in the temple of one's heart, crying 'Brahman, Brahman' is meaningless and it may be the symbol of 'a truly religious bigot'.

In order to clarify this point, Sri Ramakrishna told a story:

There lived in a village a young man named Padmalochan. People used to call him 'Podo' for short. In this village there was a temple in a very dilapidated condition. It contained no image of God. Aswattha and other plants sprang up on the ruins of its walls. Bats lived inside, and the floor was covered with dust and the droppings of the bats. The people of the village had stopped visiting the temple. One day after dusk the villagers heard the sound of a conch-shell from the direction of the temple. They thought perhaps someone had installed an image in the shrine and was performing the evening worship. One of them softly opened the door and saw Padmalochan standing in a corner, blowing the conch. No image had been set up. The temple hadn't been swept or washed. And filth and dirt lay everywhere. Then he shouted to Podo: 'You have set up no image here / Within the shrine, O fool! / Blowing the conch, you simply make / Confusion worse confounded' (125). ... There is no use in merely making a noise if

you want to establish the Deity in the shrine of your heart, if you want to realize God. First of all purify the mind. In the pure heart God takes His seat (125).

The purification of mind is very important. Unless and until the mind is purified God cannot be installed in the temple of the heart and no one is permitted to deliver religious and moral lectures on morality. If someone tries to deliver lectures on religion and morality there is a possibility of the lectures being from the perspective of a 'religious bigot' instead of their being from the perspective of 'a truly religious person'.

From the above discussion, the concept of a truly religious person should become clear. But, what about the concept of a virtuous person? In order to be moral or 'a truly religious person', one should be virtuous. Let us look into the notion of a virtuous person from the Western perspective. It seems that the Western concept of a virtuous person is compatible with the Indian concept of 'a truly religious person'. A person is virtuous if and only if one possesses some virtues. Virtues are, in general, the clusters of those good qualities that are always beneficial for human beings. According to Philippa Foot, 'Human beings do not get on well without them [virtues]. Nobody can get on well if he lacks courage, and does not have some measure of temperance and wisdom, while communities where justice and charity are lacking are apt to be wretched places to live.'<sup>12</sup>

Philippa Foot, a famous modern moral philosopher holds that courage, wisdom, justice, charity, and generosity are virtues. As virtues are beneficial, nobody can be harmed by the virtuous person. As a result those persons who are virtuous can never be harmful to others. That's why there are no possibilities of virtuous persons doing immoral actions.

This point would be clear if we understand the difference between knowledge and wisdom.

Wisdom is a virtue but knowledge is not; because knowledge is connected with what is sought for, on the other hand, wisdom is linked with not only what is sought for but also what is wished for. Virtuous persons should have the knowledge of the good ends and the right ways to reach the good ends. The right ways to reach the good ends imply why the virtuous must be moral, because the right ways to reach the good ends means the ways where the moral worth remains intact.

Sri Ramakrishna was not only such a virtuous person but he also removed some of the moral dilemmas in his unique manner. One of these moral dilemmas is concerned between the life of the householder and the renunciate. If someone likes to follow his worldly life, then one fails to do some duties that are essential to the life of the renunciate. Again, from the perspective of a renunciate, one has to stay aloof from worldly life. That is why, in general, it is thought that one, who has chosen the life of an ordinary householder has no time or energy for the higher, more difficult spiritual practices, as befitting a renunciate. In exactly the same manner, it has also been understood that a hermit or a sannyasin must leave the world, go out to a forest, think of God there in peace and strive for one's moksha or salvation alone, beyond all worldly worries, temptations, disturbances, failings, and the like.

But, the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna have proved that there can never be such artificial divisions in life, which is a beautiful whole, a harmonious whole, and a self-adjusted whole eternally. A householder can also have the attitude of a renunciate, and a sannyasin can also be empathetic to the world. A householder, though in the midst of what is ordinarily called 'the mire of worldly existence', can be free from being submerged in it. The householder, through one's own independent efforts, must rise above,

conquer and transcend ‘the mire of worldly existence’, and just as a lotus springs up gloriously from filthy stinking mire, so the householder too must bloom forth like a lotus out of the mire of mundane existence.

Let us take another example of such a problem. This problem arises out the relation between the individual soul and Brahman, as propounded in Vedanta. Here, this problem is not directly concerned with morality, but the manner through which Sri Ramakrishna solved the problem is very simple and profound. According to Advaita Vedanta, the attainment of liberation does not mean the production of anything new that was not there before. It is only the realisation of the identity of the individual soul and Brahman. It is like the finding of the necklace on the neck by one who forgot its existence there and searched for it hither and thither. The Advaitins maintain the identity of the individual soul and Brahman on the basis of Upanishadic statements like ‘*Tat tvam asi*’. But Sri Ramakrishna used a very simple but profound simile to illustrate this difficult point. He just raised the following question: ‘Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. No sooner was it in the water than it melted. Now who was to tell the depth?’<sup>13</sup> The depth of the ocean can never be measured with the help of a doll which is made of salt, because the doll will fail to reach the bottom of the ocean in the course of measurement. It will melt in the ocean. Similarly the identity of the individual soul will be merged into the undifferentiated mass of consciousness which is called Brahman. According to Bimal Krishna Matilal, the ‘subject-objective duality, will be lost forever. ... The measurer, measuring and the object of measurement will melt into one whole unity. This is called Brahman experience.’<sup>14</sup>

Another deep moral philosophical issue is the

actual meaning of the term ahimsa or non-violence. According to Mahatma Gandhi ahimsa or non-violence is a moral principle of life. A person who is the follower of this principle would not use violence even if one’s life is in danger. Matilal says: ‘It needs great courage to accept death in this way, and great moral courage is the most adorable (ethical) virtue on the earth’ (17). But the practical situation is different. It is really difficult for a person A to sacrifice one’s life in order to abide by this moral principle of ahimsa or non-violence when an immoral person B is trying to kill A. It is like a situation where a poisonous snake is going to bite an ignorant human being. It is the nature of a snake to bite, but it is practically impossible for a follower of the moral principle of ahimsa or non-violence to be bitten by the snake for death. Sri Ramakrishna told a story to solve this crucial problem of ahimsa or non-violence: A snake that lives besides a playground started living a saintly life after getting instructions from a guru. It became the follower of total non-violence. After this, children began to disturb the snake. They threw stones on it and beat it with sticks. But the snake never reacted, became weak, and was almost in a dying state. When the guru came to visit the snake, he asked, ‘What happened?’ The snake answered, ‘I have followed your advice and I have got this result.’ The guru exclaimed: ‘What a shame! You are such a fool! You don’t know how to protect yourself. I asked you not to bite, but I didn’t forbid you to hiss. Why didn’t you scare them by hissing?’<sup>15</sup>

From the above mentioned examples, it is clear that Sri Ramakrishna’s way of solving long-pending philosophical issues including moral issues depended on the practical situation of life. Being a non-traditional philosopher, he always used that kind of pragmatic situation, which is easy to grasp even by a layperson, but are nonetheless profound. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna solved

many deep-seated moral problems in this way. The utilitarian also gives the formula, 'Greatest happiness to the greatest number', in order to decide whether an action is good or not on the basis of its empirical consequences. Similarly, Kant attracts our attention to his formulation of the categorial imperative: 'Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law'.<sup>16</sup> This imperative does not depend on any consequence of actions. But Sri Ramakrishna's uniqueness lies in the fact that he at first fixed the destination of human life: each and every human being has a purpose in life, one has to rise above, conquer, and sublimate 'the mire of worldly existence'. To achieve this goal, one should always be moral, but the ground of morality must be rooted in everyday life, else it would lose its practical utility. Sri Ramakrishna realised this. ☸

### Notes and References

1. *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 2000), 180.
2. Sri Ramakrishna 'always talked to the Divine Mother and took instructions from Her. He would also weep, calling out, "Mother, Mother". He would say: "O Mother, I shall hear You and You alone. I don't know the sacred books, nor do I know scholars. If You explain to me, only then will I believe" (M., *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (English), trans. Dharm Pal Gupta, 5 vols (Chandigarh: Sri Ma Trust, 2001), 1.6 <<https://kathamrit.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/volume-1-second-edition.pdf>> accessed 19 August 2018. Also see, Srima, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (Bengali), 5 vols (Kolkata: Udbodhan, 2013), 1.4.
3. Swami Bhashyananda, 'Sri Ramakrishna's Contribution to Modern Thought', *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial*, eds D P Gupta and D K Sengupta (Chandigarh: Sri Ma Trust, 2009), 44 <<https://kathamrit.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/cm.pdf>> accessed 19 August 2018.
4. Here the term 'realism' has been used not to mean that moral value judgements are factual and that this is why these are real, but to mean 'realism about material objects and realism about other minds to be important parts of our commonsense metaphysics. Likewise, I take moral realism to be an important part of commonsense morality.' (Michael C Rea, 'Naturalism and Moral Realism', *Knowledge and Reality: Essays in Honour of Alvin Plantinga*, eds Thomas M Crisp, Matthew Davidson, and David Vander Laan (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 215).
5. See Tom L Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 339.
6. See G E Moore, *Principia Ethica* (London: Cambridge University, 1932), II.
7. 'Thus, if I say to someone, "You acted wrongly in stealing that money", I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, "You stole that money". In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, "You stole that money", in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks.' (Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952), 107).
8. See Rajkumar Modak, 'Ethical Supernaturalism', *Philosophy Pathways*, 217 (14 November 2017), 1-14; 4 <[https://philosophypathways.com/articles/Rajkumar\\_Modak\\_Ethical\\_Supernaturalism.pdf](https://philosophypathways.com/articles/Rajkumar_Modak_Ethical_Supernaturalism.pdf)> accessed 19 August 2018.
9. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 6.8.7.
10. J N Mohanty, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 46.
11. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 125.
12. Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), 2-3.
13. *Gospel*, 148.
14. *Ethics and Epics: The Collected Essays of Bimal Krishna Matilal*, ed. Jonardon Ganeri (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2002), 16.
15. *Gospel*, 86.
16. Immanuel Kant, *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:421.

# ***Swami Vivekananda and the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893: New Perspectives***

**Swami Narasimhananda**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

## ***Analysing the Parliament***

**A**CCORDING TO Konden Rich Smith, the ‘Columbian World’s Fair of Chicago in 1893 was one of the most publicized events of the nineteenth century’. He writes further:

Its announced intentions were to represent the beginning of a new age, one of cultural awareness and also technological development. The World’s Fair, which ran from May to October 1893, had three components, the ‘White City’, the ‘Midway Plaisance’, and the massive ‘Congress Auxiliary’. The White City celebrated the glories of ‘secular’ government, commerce, and manufacture; the Midway exploited cultural as well as racial differences; and the Congress Auxiliary (which included 224 General Divisions in twenty departments) was devoted to even more diverse interests, ranging from the fine arts to the latest developments in surgery.<sup>15</sup>

1893 was a historic year. It ‘foreshadowed the century that was to produce two world wars, the atomic bomb and nuclear weapons, unconscionable racism, religious intolerance and ethnic cleansing’.<sup>16</sup> Thillayvel Naidoo believes that Swamiji’s ‘addresses at the august gathering left upon all an “indelible impress”, as Gandhi described it. For Vivekananda the heart of religion lay in restating the right of every person in the world to a life of

economic, social and political freedom as a prelude to spiritual freedom’ (79). This points to the broad vision that Swamiji had regarding the religious and spiritual life of an individual.

One of the aims of the Parliament was to ‘demonstrate the cumulative power of religion’ and to ‘show that religion was capable of producing a “cosmopolitan” person, who transcended the pitfalls of a parochial spirit, and who was capable of having a “universal” outlook’.<sup>17</sup> According to Egal Feldman, a very important reason for the ‘general approval in academic and religious circles both in home and abroad’ of the idea of the Parliament was ‘a growing interest in the study of comparative religions’.<sup>18</sup>

It was definitely a great step on the part of the orthodox Christians to organise such a Parliament. Some shared an egalitarian vision of religion. As James F Cleary argues,

Catholic participation in the parliament most probably ought to be considered as an outgrowth of the liberal vision of the place of the Church in America. It was their answer to charges that the Church could not successfully accommodate itself to the American mode of life. They believed that the Church belonged in the midst of the other religions and maintained that the Church had nothing to fear from the scrutiny of the world, but rather should welcome it.<sup>19</sup>

Also, 'the Parliament ... reflected growing interest of Americans in exotic non-Western religions'.<sup>20</sup> Mircea Eliade and Joseph M Kitagawa make this assessment of the Parliament:

Among the participants were many notable scholars, including historians of religions, but they attended the parliament as representatives of their faiths or denominations and not of the discipline of the history of religions. Nevertheless, in the minds of many Americans, comparative religion and the cause of the World Parliament of Religions became inseparably related. What interested many ardent supporters of the parliament was the religious and philosophical inquiry into the possibility of the unity of all religions, and not the scholarly, religio-scientific study of religions. Nevertheless, the history of religions and comparative religion, however they might be interpreted, became favorite subjects in various educational institutions in America.<sup>21</sup>

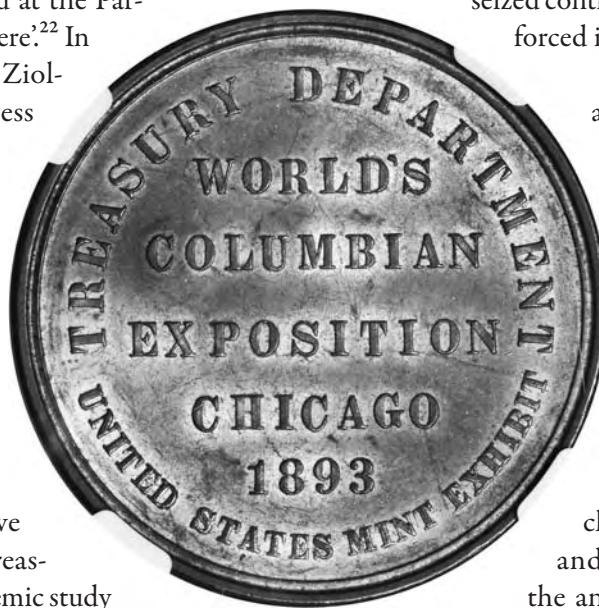
Richard Hughes Seager follows Kitagawa in giving the proper place that the Parliament deserves in history. Seager is concerned that it 'is also instructive to consider those parties that were underrepresented at the Parliament or were not there'.<sup>22</sup> In

the same vein, Eric J Ziolkowski aims to 'reassess the meaning and significance and the histories and legacies of the 1893 Parliament as a meeting of religious faiths and to shed light upon the role of the event as a critical moment in the development of the very perspective from which we now reassess it: that of the academic study

of religion'.<sup>23</sup> The Parliament 'was the first time in history that leaders of so-called "Eastern" and "Western" religions had come together for dialogue, seeking a common spiritual foundation for global unity'.<sup>24</sup> The Parliament was also 'one of the first instances of contact between Americans and Asian religionists'.<sup>25</sup>

David Mislin situates the Parliament in the context of Protestant leaders and how they view religious pluralism.<sup>26</sup> David F Burg states that John Henry Barrows pointed out that it required the parliament of all faiths to bring together the dissident Christian faiths.<sup>27</sup> Tomoko Masuzawa's study of the Parliament 'concerns a particular aspect of the formation of modern European identity, a fairly recent history of how Europe came to self-consciousness: Europe as a harbinger of universal history, as a prototype of unity and plurality'.<sup>28</sup> Lakshmi Niwas Jhunjhunwala analyses the Parliament as the backdrop for colonial and missionary agenda, particularly, unmasking the real motives of Max Muller.<sup>29</sup> Swami Prabhananda argues that 'history demonstrated that Swami Vivekananda practically seized control of the Parliament and forced it to a new goal'.<sup>30</sup>

Lucien Arréat argues about the Parliament that a 'A generous thought has however dominated this assembly, and the unanimous applause provoked each time by the words of fraternity and concord strongly testify that the peoples of today claim a religion of peace and are tired of writing the annals of the world with



blood.<sup>31</sup> Larry A Fader argues that

The 1893 Chicago World's Parliament of Religions was a significant event in the history of interreligious dialogue, generating excitement and anticipation on many levels. As a human spectacle, for example, consider the curiosity aroused by the appearance of the many delegates espousing strange and little-known beliefs, arriving from distant, mysterious lands, dressed in alien garb, unfamiliar ways and speaking languages rarely heard by Americans.<sup>32</sup>

Some religious traditions used the Parliament as a place to shift 'from premillennial proselytizing to a balance of evangelism and "exhibition"—exhibition being intended, at least in part, to pave the way for evangelism'.<sup>33</sup> Kirin Narayan says that Swamiji's visit to America for the Parliament provided 'the first concrete illustration that the Hindu tradition was not just frozen in misshapen forms or buried in lofty texts but continued to be transmitted by living teachers'.<sup>34</sup> Narayan also analyses the last passage from Swamiji's 'Paper on Hinduism': 'Hail, Columbia, motherland of liberty! It has been given to thee, who never dipped her hand in her neighbour's blood, who never found out that the shortest way of becoming rich was by robbing one's neighbours, it has been given to thee to march at the vanguard of civilisation with the flag of harmony'.<sup>35</sup>

Narayan says that this

portrayal of a noninterventionist, nonimperialist United States mocks history. It ignores the bloody conquest of the Americas. Ironically, moreover, just five years after Vivekananda spoke, the United States would acquire the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and also Hawaii in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War of 1898. Nonetheless, Vivekananda's emphasis on America's acceptance of imported religions is in many ways prescient. Despite the claims of Indian newspapers, Vivekananda did not convert vast numbers of Americans, but he did

occupy an important historical position as the first guru to accept Western disciples, thus inaugurating a reverse transcultural religious flow.<sup>36</sup>

Many scholars concur that the Parliament failed in achieving its high aims. According to Smith, 'However lofty its goals, the Parliament of Religions failed notably in inclusiveness and actually highlighted evangelical Christianity's growing inability to control the social and religious world around them. The final message of the parliament was not the triumphalism of the Christian message but the limitations and sectarian divisions of the Christian nation'.<sup>37</sup>

Paul E Teed affirms that the 'growing vibrancy and ferment of religious thought among Indian intellectuals, a trend embodied by men like Vivekananda and Mazumdar, helped to convince American missionary societies that young recruits heading into the field would need more sophisticated knowledge of South Asia's rich spiritual heritage in order to be effective advocates for their own'.<sup>38</sup> Travis D Webster argues that the Parliament 'was a testament to nineteenth century ideals of universalism'.<sup>39</sup>

Gwilym Beckerlegge argues that at the Parliament 'arguably for the first time, representatives of different religions began to make common cause in the light of their shared experience of global pressures exerted by scientific and other socio-economic forces. Vivekananda's encounter with the sense of globality fostered at Chicago in turn may have increased the pressure on him to identify and clarify the place of Hinduism in the world'.<sup>40</sup> Amy Kittelstrom argues that Swamiji's 'conviction of the social purpose of religion turned out to be perfectly attuned to the mood of the Parliament, its American Protestant organizers, and its late Victorian audience'.<sup>41</sup>

Ziolkowski argues that as

an unprecedented meeting of representatives of the world's major religions, the parliament

allowed certain Eastern faiths to be presented for the first time in America by spokesmen of their own, and is justifiably remembered for having stimulated Western sympathy and curiosity in Eastern spirituality, encouraged the study of comparative religion in American universities, and for having helped foster the ‘dialogue’ between East and West.<sup>42</sup>

Ziolkowski traces the idea of the Parliament to the religious tradition of Din-i Ilahi propounded by the ‘Mogul emperor Akbar, a figure whose life and accomplishments were still not well known in the West at the time of the parliament’.<sup>43</sup>

According to Dennis P McCann, the ‘representatives of non-Western religions at the 1893 Parliament generally were not in a position to question the tacit understandings warranting the Social Gospel perspective; instead, they tried to show how their own traditions contributed at least as effectively to the overall progress of humanity’.<sup>44</sup>

Carlos Hugo Parra has done his doctoral research on the Catholic Church and the Parliament. Though Parra concentrates on the perspectives of the Catholics on the Parliament, he also delves on the Catholic interactions with the other religions. He believes that Swamiji’s speeches at the ‘Parliament is considered by many a highlight of the gathering. His speeches were acclaimed as the most insightful uttered at the event. His visit to Chicago and subsequent trips to North America are recalled as key to the penetration of Hindu thought and practices in the West.’<sup>45</sup>

According to Peter van der Veer, Swamiji’s ‘translation of Ramakrishna’s message in terms of “spirituality” was literally transferred to the West during his trip to the United States ... Vivekananda’s spirituality was not modest or meek; it was forceful, polemical, and proud.’<sup>46</sup> He sees the Parliament as a ‘major step in [the]

... direction’ of ‘the development of an audience for universal spirituality’.<sup>47</sup>

Seager considers the Parliament to be an arousing call from America to the other nations for gearing up towards a pluralistic understanding of religions:

The encounter on the Parliament floor can be considered a call and response, with industrializing America, the young scion of the West, issuing a call for congresses ... It was a grand, idealistic, and fundamentally liberal call inviting the Asians to share in an expansive, global vision, but one cast wholly in western, Christian terms and partaking of an often smug largess that depended upon the West’s racial, political, economic, and religious hegemony.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Clarification of Some Facts of the Parliament***

When any great historical event is fogged by time, numerous theories and concoctions of facts surface. New artefacts emerge and the olden documents are forgotten. The World’s Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 is no exception. There are mainly two distortions of fact that I would like to clarify here. Many detractors of Swamiji and Hinduism claim that Swamiji’s ‘Response to Welcome’ did not evoke the response and applause that it is said to have received. This claim is baseless because Barrows, who later went against Swamiji, records: ‘When Mr. Vivekananda addressed the audience as “sisters and brothers of America”, there arose a peal of applause that lasted several minutes’.<sup>49</sup>

Another distortion of fact is the claim that Swamiji’s voice was recorded in the Parliament. While the Parliament has numerous accounts, many of which are verbatim, we find no description of any kind of public address system employed there, much less of phonogram, which was the only audio recording system extant in 1893. Also, Swamiji was not the only speaker at

the Parliament. It is highly implausible that all the other distinguished speakers at the Parliament did not have their voices recorded and only Swamiji's voice was recorded. Also, there is only one version of Swamiji's speeches at the Parliament that is claimed to be his voice; the other versions are expressedly, only readings of his speeches. The version that is claimed to be Swamiji's voice begins with an introduction by a woman, whereas we find from Barrows's account that all introductions for that session were done by Barrows himself (1.96–101). Swamiji himself tells this in his letter to Alasinga Perumal on 2 November 1893: 'I... bowed down to Devi Sarasvati and stepped up, and Dr Barrows introduced me.'<sup>50</sup> The extant recording was published by an organisation in the early eighties to attract some buyers and the voice had been artificially synthesised to give the archival feeling. This fact has been cleared up by the extensive research of M S Nanjundiah.<sup>51</sup> Those who like to dupe less-knowing people into the attractions of artefacts by creating fake ones, need to know that history punishes such people by enveloping them into its dust.

### ***The Intolerance of the Church***

As is now well known, the core idea behind the organising of the Parliament was that 'all "lower" religions would be subsumed as part of Christianity'.<sup>52</sup> Feldman says that the 'hope that the Parliament would promote the Christian faith was foremost in the minds of a number of its leading American supporters'.<sup>53</sup> 'Unbending orthodoxy had its say' and at 'one point, for example, a prayer was offered "for those blind heathens who attended the congress",—especially Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmans, "that God might have mercy on them and open their eyes", so that they could "see their own errors and accept the truth of Christianity"' (185).<sup>54</sup> However, though the

church authorities 'endeavored to plan their appearances and speeches so that they would give no notion of yielding a single point of Catholic doctrine while urging the basic need of religion, there were several ambiguous circumstances over which they had no control'.<sup>55</sup> But, the charge 'that the participating prelates had compromised the Catholic position' by allowing members of the other religions to participate was denied on the ground that much good 'was accomplished by permitting non-Catholics to hear Catholic doctrines'.<sup>56</sup>

The intolerance of the orthodox Christians can be seen by the musings of this observer, just after the Parliament:

The Congress may have sinned by the excess of its mastery. The spirit of profound charity which animated it seems to have inspired it with too much indulgence for even contradictory doctrines. It is not the syncretism of the honest elements of all religions that will be the basis of the cult of the future, as the promoters of the work of the Congress seem to believe; it will be the sincere, complete return to the One whom the Parliament has acclaimed and who alone has been able to say: 'I am the way, the truth and the life!'<sup>57</sup>

Even after a century, the Parliament did not seem to have a great effect in curbing the growing intolerance of the Church. As Karen Armstrong observes,

Western Christianity ... since the Crusades, has found it notoriously difficult to live side by side with other religions; it has also tended to lose sight of the agnostic approach and to seek an unrealistic certainty in religious matters. We in the West are fond of castigating others for their intolerance, but the conservative venture has a special urgency for us, if we are not to fail the test of our century and are to hand on a compassionate faith to the next generation.<sup>58</sup>

Even in the Parliament, where other religions were supposed to be understood, what was seen

instead was ‘the tendency toward religious imperialism, where sincere but unmindful attempts at inclusion end up excluding’.<sup>59</sup>

Donald H Bishop argues that the Parliament was ‘a classical example of the attitudes a follower of one religion may take when he is confronted by other faiths. Three emerged at Chicago; they may be called exclusion, inclusion and pluralism. Exclusion is the attitude that there is only one true religion which is destined to become universal. It was the attitude or view expressed most often at the Congress’.<sup>60</sup> Derek H Davis reminds us that ‘one of the founding principles [of the Parliament] was that no religious group would be pressured into sacrificing its truth claims’.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Denouncing Hinduism***

The religion that gained the maximum prominence out of the Parliament was Hinduism as was its gifted monastic proponent, Swamiji. The interest in Hinduism that was slowly developing in the West increased astronomically after the Parliament. And it was not surprising that the Christians did not like this at all. Since then, they started a systematic campaign to vilify the religion and kept closely following Swamiji’s speeches to find out apparent ‘grey areas’, where they could dig a trench and hide there to destroy Hinduism. Of course, these ‘grey areas’ were and are visible only to the uneducated, who do not have the dedication to read into the contexts and true meanings of Hindu texts.

It is no secret that the Christian missionaries ridiculed and scoffed at the Hindus and went to great lengths to proselytise them. However, the methods they adopted are appalling. In spite of great developments in Western thought, ‘there was a feeling of religious superiority that the colonialists felt they had acquired due to their Christian revelation’.<sup>62</sup>

Swamiji explained, in his lectures in the West,

how the migrants from the other side of the River Sindhu, called the practitioners of Sana-tana Dharma, ‘Hindus’, because they could not pronounce the consonant ‘S’. This explanation has been twisted by the Christians to mean that there was no religion named Hinduism and that ‘it was *constructed*, piece by piece’.<sup>63</sup> Hinduism has been said to be ‘imagined’<sup>64</sup> and its construction has been held to be colonial. Some overenthusiastic thinkers had in the nineteenth century labelled Hinduism as ‘a way of life’ that has led the missionaries and the quasi-liberals masquerading as Marxists to define Hinduism as an ‘umbrella of religions’. By this logic, any person changing one’s name, changes into a completely different person whose birth coincides with the time of name change!

Roderick Hindery argues that Swamiji ‘offered his sophisticated defense of Advaitic neo-Hinduism as the matrix of what was spiritually superior in every religion’.<sup>65</sup> Hindery believes that Swamiji tried to homogenise Hinduism, relegating its rich tradition of mythic lore. Stephan Schlensog argues that Swamiji created a brand of political Hinduism at the Parliament where he was ‘an imposing representative of a pluri-form, tolerant, and cosmopolitan Hinduism’.<sup>66</sup>

Robert Eric Frykenberg describes the so-called ‘construction’ of Hinduism:

The ‘official’ (or establishment) structure, in summary, consisted of at least five elements: (1) Hinduism as a nativistic synonym for all things Indian (or pertaining to India); (2) Hinduism as an ancient civilization, something clearly identifiable before 1800 and going back 5,000 years; (3) Hinduism, as a loosely defined label describing all socioreligious phenomena found or originating in India (comparable to, but less pejorative than, paganism as a label for nonmonotheistic religions in the ancient Graeco-Roman world); (4) Hinduism as an institutional/ideological instrument for the

sociocultural and sociopolitical integration of an All-India (imperial or national) sway; and (5) Hinduism as a single religion which, with the coming of Swami Narendrath Datta Vivekananda to the First World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, was gradually recognized and then elevated by liberally minded and eclectic Western clerics into the rank of a world religion. A pragmatic, and sometimes, romantic blending of these five representations ... helped to reify Hinduism in popular imaginations. With Western impetus, this blending was then projected onto the world.<sup>67</sup>

Axel Michaels divides Hinduism into three 'religions' of 'sectarian religions', 'syncretically founded religions', and 'founded, proselytised religions'. He places Swamiji's thought under 'syncretically found religions'.<sup>68</sup> Richard King calls Swamiji's presentation of Hinduism as the foundation of 'a renascent intellectual movement, which might more accurately be labelled "Neo-Hinduism" or "Neo-Vedanta" rather than "Hinduism".'<sup>69</sup>

Describing a congress of religions named *Dharma-Mahotsava* that took place in Ajmer, India in September 1895, Virchand R Gandhi, who participated in the Parliament, counters arguments against Hinduism and India, and says that 'the people of India, say our opponents, are merely speculative, visionary, unpractical. If one tries to reach the ancient literature of India and dive deep into it, he shall know what the great sages in the past have said about politics, law, war, and polity in general.'<sup>70</sup>

This discourse about 'Imagined Hinduism' needs to be critically analysed and challenged in another place as this is not the appropriate venue for that. However, we need to understand that the Christian missionaries have repeatedly portrayed Swamiji's success at the Parliament as his attempt to create a new religion called 'Hinduism'.

### **Influence on the United States of America**

There are numerous accounts of the impact that the Parliament in general, and Swamiji in particular, made on the US. A look at the new dimensions of this influence can be best begun by quoting this poem by Minnie Andrews Snell:

Aunt Hannah on the Parliament of Religions  
Minnie Andrews Snell

Wall—I'm glad enough I'm hum agin—kin  
rest my weary brain,  
For I've seen an' heered so much *too* much,  
I guess I've heered in vain.  
I thought th' Fair was mixin' an' th' Midway  
made me crawl,  
But th' Parl'ment of Religions  
was th' mixin'est of all!

I seen th' Turks agoing round th' Midway  
in th' Fair,  
But our minister reproved me when he seen  
me peep in thair.  
'Defilin' place' he called it,  
an' th' Turk 'a child of sin';  
But th' Parl'ment of Religions took all them  
heathen in.

It made me squirm a little,  
to see some heathen's air,  
As he told us Christians 'bout out faults an'  
laid 'em out so bare,  
But thair flowin' robes was tellin' an' th'air  
mighty takin' folk,  
So th' Parl'ment of Religions clapped to every  
word they spoke.

I listened to th' Buddhist,  
in his robes of shinin' white,  
As he told how like to Christ's thair lives,  
while ours was not—a mite,  
'Tel I felt, to lead a Christian life,  
a Buddhist I must be,  
An' th' Parl'ment of Religions brought reli-  
gious doubt to me.

Then I heered th' han'some Hindu monk,  
drest up in orange dress,

Who sed that all humanity was part of God—  
no less,  
An' he sed we was *not* sinners,  
so I comfort took, once more,  
While th' Parl'ment of Religions roared  
with approving roar.

Then a Cath'lic man got up an' spoke,  
about Christ an' th' cross;  
But th' Christians of th' other creeds,  
they giv' thair heds a toss.  
When th' Babtist spoke,  
th' Presbyterians seemed to be fightin' mad,  
'Tel th' Parl'ment of Religions made my pore  
old soul feel sad.

I've harkened to th' Buddhist,  
to th' Hindu an' th' Turk;  
I've tried to find th' truth that in our different  
sects may lurk,  
'Tel my pore old brain it buzzes,  
like its goin' religious mad—  
For th' Parl'ment of Religions nigh put out th'  
light I had.

Must I leave all this sarchin' 'tel  
I reach th' other side?  
I'll treat all men as brothers  
while on this airth I bide,  
An' let 'Love' be my motto,  
'tel I enter in th' door.  
Of that great Religious Parl'ment,  
where creeds don't count no more.<sup>71</sup>

The entire poem stresses the catholicity of the Eastern religions in comparison to different forms of Christianity. The following paragraph is a wonderful eulogy of Swamiji:

Then I heered th' han'some Hindu monk,  
drest up in orange dress,  
Who sed that all humanity was part of God—  
no less,  
An' he sed we was *not* sinners,  
so I comfort took, once more,  
While th' Parl'ment of Religions roared with  
approving roar.

Some scholars argue that interreligious dialogue got a great impetus by the Parliament and if such dialogue were to be compared to a table, 'Guests have been sitting at this table, which has been conveniently moved around—especially since the 1893 first Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago'.<sup>72</sup> Some scholars argue that the 'beginning of the interfaith movement dates back to the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893'.<sup>73</sup> Patrice Brodeur argues that

a new attitude of non-proselytizing came to prevail during the Parliament in an otherwise conservative Christian milieu. Several factors coincided to create this new space, three of which are: the new travel technologies resulting from the industrial revolution; the new philosophies, both political and theological, that emerged from the growing Western scientific discourse; and the new colonial discoveries about the diversity of human cultures. The idea of World Fairs combined all of these factors. Yet one factor in particular made the Chicago parliament unique within the history of World Fairs: its American social location allowed new forms of religious explorations, such as the new concept of interfaith dialogue, because of the social impact of the First Amendment of the US Constitution.<sup>74</sup>

B G Gokhale states that Swamiji 'profoundly impressed his audience [at the Parliament] by his eloquence and earnestness, and his activities in America became the basis of his fame and leadership upon his return to India'.<sup>75</sup> Prem Shanker and Uma Parameswaran argue that Swamiji, a

Hindu monk, invited to speak at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, was sweeping across the United States like an effulgent beam of light, illuminating areas of possible intellectual development that had been peripherally speculated upon but never thought of as integral to the science of psychology. Swami Vivekananda's visit to the United States had far-reaching effects in many fields, not the least important of which was psychology.<sup>76</sup>

### The Lasting Impression

The World's Parliament of Religions has an impact that is felt even today. The spread of Indian philosophy in general and yoga in particular, owes much to Swamiji's addresses at the Parliament. Even the predominantly 'mental yoga equivalent to the *Yoga Sutra*', which was later taught by Swamiji, gained more audience in the West after the Parliament.<sup>77</sup>

The 1893 Parliament of Religions created a great interest in interfaith dialogue and a demand for similar gatherings. The centenary of the 1893 Parliament was observed as another Parliament in 1993 at Chicago. This was followed by Parliaments in 1999 at Cape Town; in 2004 at Barcelona; in 2009 at Melbourne; in 2015 at Salt Lake City, and the forthcoming Parliament will be held in November 2018 at Toronto.<sup>78</sup> The 1993 Parliament called for a 'mutual transformation of world religions'.<sup>79</sup>

Jon P Bloch is of the opinion that these Parliaments are not 'receiving wider attention'.<sup>80</sup> He argues that 'the Parliament's understanding of global religious ethic falls short insofar as addressing the inherent complexities of globalization' (614). The Parliament has to be studied and newer ways of addressing the phenomenon of religion have to be effectively communicated to wider audiences. Bill J Leonard opines that 'The World's Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, included representatives of the great world religions in an effort to survey the changing spiritual environment of the then "modern" world. A century later ... few observers of American culture would deny that there is an increasing curiosity about, if not participation in, varying dimensions of the spiritual life'.<sup>81</sup>

The Parliament was the harbinger of sweeping changes in the religious tapestry across the world, particularly in the US. As R Marie Griffith notes, 'it is no longer possible to describe the United States as a Judeo-Christian nation, as many Americans once thought of their country.

Nor is it possible today to defend theories of secularization that once held sway, when it was believed that religious faith and practice would markedly decline in the U.S. and that religion's social prominence and cultural influence would likewise fade into obscurity'.<sup>82</sup>

Undoubtedly, if any one nation has benefited the most from the Parliament and Swamiji's participation in it, it is India. In one masterly stroke, with his famous address, 'Sisters and Brothers of America', Swamiji not only awakened the intrinsic spirituality of the world, through the modern conglomeration of cultures that is the US, he reinvigorated India's channels of renunciation and service and reminded her that her slumber was causing a global gloom, and that she had to wake up, be free in all spheres, and uplift the entire humanity to the lofty ideal and realisation of identification with God.

Swamiji's speeches at the Parliament became the seeds of a unique kind of integrative nationalism that has not yet been completely understood. As Samta Pandya argues, 'Commencing with the postulate of the educative role of India to the west in the sphere of value, religion, and spirituality as per the 1893 Chicago address, the insertion of "religion" as a keynote to the national life of India became integral'.<sup>83</sup>

However, D N Dhanagere laments that Swamiji's 'words of wisdom' at the Parliament 'have been either forgotten or their meaning misread by the American superpower. To dominate the unipolar world, today, the United States, assisted by her MNCS, is doing exactly the opposite'.<sup>84</sup> His sentiment is shared by Jagmohan:

By forgetting Vivekananda's insightful message to accept the entire planet as an inextricably enmeshed entity and recognise the common ancestry and common future of man, present-day United States is missing an epoch-making opportunity to extend its strong helping hand to

propel human consciousness to a higher orbit of global fairness, balance and harmony. On the other hand, barring a few formal declarations, it continues to act virtually as a ‘godfather’ of the current system which is pumping huge quantities of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, overheating the Earth, transforming it into a pressure-cooker, and exposing it to the grave risk of explosion and resultant destruction of all life on our planet. At home, [India] too, the opportunity to attain social cohesion and family stability has been lost because of the neglect of the soul-force which Vivekananda wanted the Americans to develop along with development of their economy and technology.<sup>85</sup>

Diana L Eck succinctly describes how the challenges for interreligious understanding have changed today:

The universalism so dominant 100 years ago is now challenged by fundamentalists and pluralists alike, though for different reasons. For the fundamentalist, the very idea that all religions have a common kernel and core undermines the particularity of one’s own faith and reduces those well-defended boundaries to mere husks. For the pluralist, universalism poses a more covert problem. As the Parliament so clearly demonstrated, and as the early phases of the comparative study of religion confirmed, the universal is usually somebody’s particular writ large. Pluralism, however, is a distinctively different perspective. The pluralist does not expect or desire the emergence of a universal religion, a kind of religious Esperanto. Nor does the pluralist seek a common essence in all religions, though much that is common may be discovered. The commitment of the pluralist is rather to engage the diversity, in the mutually transformative process of understanding, rather than to obliterate it.<sup>86</sup>

According to Rolland Emerson Wolfe, ‘A good start [at interreligious understanding] was made at the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893 when the “Parliament of Religions” was formed, but that movement was allowed to die. As it is,

religion again is found trailing humanity instead of being out to the fore and leading.’<sup>87</sup>

After the Parliament and mainly after hearing Swamiji’s speeches, many faith-traditions became quite tolerant and even sold literature on Swamiji.<sup>88</sup> Amanda Lucia argues that Swamiji ‘ushered in a new age of the *guru* as a public figure with his American debut in 1893’,<sup>89</sup> Dillip Kumar Maharana sees Swamiji’s ‘Response to Welcome’ as ‘one of the testimonies of Indian multiculturalism’.<sup>90</sup> Rajeev Dubey states that Swamiji’s success at the Parliament ‘is widely considered to mark the beginning of “globalising” Hinduism’.<sup>91</sup> Chandrakant Yatanoor believes that Swamiji ‘brought Hinduism to the West’ through the Parliament.<sup>92</sup> Swami Nikhilananda states that Swamiji was ‘the first cultural ambassador of India to the New World’.<sup>93</sup>

Jeffery D Long argues that speaking ‘truth to power, not unlike the biblical prophets, Vivekananda delivered [the message of plurality] ... as an Indian at a time when European colonization of much of the earth was being justified as the “white man’s burden” and as a Hindu in a land where the superiority of Christianity was taken for granted’.<sup>94</sup>

Phillip Charles Lucas argues that ‘Vivekananda attempted to combine Advaita Vedanta’s teaching of non-dual reality with a more Western concern for progressive activism’.<sup>95</sup> According to H D Sankalia, Swamiji’s message of ‘the essential oneness of all religions of the world ... thrilled the vast concourse and lifted the proceedings [of the Parliament] which until then had been flowing in narrow, separate grooves, each participant speaking for his religion only’.<sup>96</sup> S K Pachauri argues that Swamiji’s Parliament speeches generated goodwill ‘between the American and Indian peoples’.<sup>97</sup>

Swamiji’s speeches at the Parliament continue to influence believers from across religious

traditions. A Jewish believer asserts that ‘it was Vivekananda who not only helped me to understand the spirit of tolerance in the Hindu tradition but also led me to see that this spirit of tolerance is present in my own tradition’.<sup>98</sup>

Jitish Kallat, an artist, converted Swamiji’s ‘Response to Welcome’ on 11 September 1893 to a LED display on each of the ‘118 risers of the historic Woman’s Board Grand Staircase of the Art Institute of Chicago, adjacent to the site of Vivekananda’s original address. Drawing attention to the great chasm between this speech of tolerance and the very different events of September 11, 2001, the text of the speech ... [was] displayed in the colors of the United States’ Department of Homeland Security alert system’.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, Vivekananda’s speech is presented on the risers of the Grand Staircase with 68,700 glowing LED (light-emitting diode) lights in the five colors of the threat codes in a font that was specially created for this work. A computer-generated program was used to distribute the application of the five colors randomly throughout the text. The speech begins on the lowest risers of the staircase and progresses upward, so that whichever path a visitor takes up the three flights, he or she will walk through the entire speech.<sup>100</sup>

The display was exhibited from 11 September 2010 to 12 September 2011.

Kallat has imbibed Swamiji’s broad vision and feels that ‘the idea of the nation isn’t any more a potent tool to comprehend artistic practice. So attaching the noun “Indian” like an adjective to describe an artist may not hold good as the syntactic precision or descriptive capability of the adjective to differentiate has dissolved somewhat in today’s world, integrated though it may be by satellites in the sky and fiber-optic cables under the sea’.<sup>101</sup>

Swamiji presented India to the world through the Parliament and that has led to the understanding that ‘in a transformed international order, ... [India’s] assets and resources are more relevant to

a wide range of American interests than they have been for 50 years. They cannot be safely ignored in the future, as they have been in the past’.<sup>102</sup>

Seager argues that ‘Vivekananda’s Hindu theism was the basis for an inclusivist theological vision that made a major contribution to the Parliament’s protean ambiguities’.<sup>103</sup> In his review of Seager’s *The World’s Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter*, James E Ketelaar says:

Seager interprets the Parliament from different perspectives: as a singular event in American religious history, as a facet of the Columbian Exposition, and as an event with global consequences. He suggests that the Parliament as an expression of eighteenth-century classical revivalism embodied the iconic style for Anglo-Protestant civil religion. ... The Parliament was thus ‘a struggle over the content of a myth of America’ and, Seager concludes, it ‘was a liberal, western, and American quest for world religious unity that failed’ ... Recognizing that ‘there was no single World’s Parliament of Religions, but many’ ... Seager for his part chooses to place ‘the Asians and the East/ West encounter’ at center stage of his analysis ... His discussion of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese delegates to the Parliament, though significantly hampered by the exclusive reliance upon English language materials, is a noteworthy attempt to rethink the roles of these ‘Oriental others’ in the Parliamentary vision of religion and civilization. Through a richly textured discussion of the Asian delegates, Seager effectively demonstrates that the Parliament was shot through with ‘parochialism, ethnocentrism, imperial pretensions, and hegemonic intentions’ ... In such an environment, he concludes, ‘Asians and their religions could only operate as secondary, subordinate signs in a global discourse’.<sup>104</sup>

Homi K Bhabha has a poignant portrayal of Swamiji’s influence:

Vivekananda’s national ‘public’ is a cosmopolitan public sphere consisting of citizens, refugees, diasporics; it is an ethical community that respects the rights and representation of

minorities. Vivekananda's affective mode of address represents the voice of the citizen of one country signifying the religious and political polyphony of the wretched of the earth. This is a public sphere that cannot be identified in the simple spatial polarities of local/global for two reasons: first, the historical insight that modern national territories are often sites of global settlements and the disruption or displacements of national minorities; second, 'local' and 'global' as spatial norms and measures cannot track the complex, contingent ways in which national imperatives and global interests intersect in the struggle between sovereignty and solidarity.

Thus, Swamiji's Chicago speeches continue to inspire countless, who want to experience freedom at various levels. However, we need to have a deep understanding of his ideas and strive to actualise them. Swamiji's idea of religion was person-centric and was devoid of the entanglements and impositions of institutions. He wanted every person to have the freedom to have one's own religion. He wanted everyone to accept this as a reality of life and look upon every other being only as a divine being, whose true nature is quite above the mundane characterisations we see to be associated with a person. When would Swamiji's idea of religion be realised by everyone in the world? We need not worry and have to only strive towards that goal, because as cited in the beginning of this paper, Swamiji would not rest, until every person has realised one's Self. He does not want Hinduism to prevail. He does not want Christianity to prevail. He does not want Buddhism, Islam, or Sikhism to prevail. He does not want any ism to prevail. All he wants from us is that we do not get stuck with the labels of religion, spirituality, or even humanity, but that we realise our divinity. 

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# Meditation on the Upanishads

Swami Shraddhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

EVEN IF WE WORSHIP an avatar as our chosen ideal, we first must acknowledge that we are really worshipping that being of infinite consciousness. Then the dualistic and Advaita ideas will melt together. To a mother, her child is the most wonderful child. We also feel the same about the attributes of our chosen ideal when that finite joy merges into infinite joy. It is more difficult to associate Brahman with joy than with existence. Our mind cannot show us logically how the two can merge, but as we go on with our spiritual practices, we will see how it can happen. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says, 'All the joys and experiences are particles of that infinite joy'.

## Class 15: All is Bliss

From the last chapter of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*:

'Bhrigu, respectfully approaching his father Varuna, said: "Sir, teach me Brahman". Varuna explained to him the physical sheath and the vital sheath and the functions of the senses, and added: "He from whom all beings are born, in whom they live, being born, and to whom at death they return—seek to know him. He is Brahman."'<sup>17</sup>

The son, Bhrigu says, 'Sir, please teach me Brahman'. Varuna tells him that he has to spend a few years in *tapas*, austerities, and then his mind will be clear. So Bhrigu did as he was bid.

Bhrigu meditated on the following five meditations:

1. Brahman as *annam*, food. Everything is gross at this level, but we have to penetrate this idea of grossness.
2. Brahman as *prana*, life force.

3. Brahman as *manas*, the mind.
4. Brahman as *vijnana*, the intellect.
5. Brahman as *ananda*, joy.

In the first stage, with our mind and senses running in all directions, it is not possible to see Brahman. We must close our eyes. Matter is not really distracting us. It is the manifold that is distracting us. We must have the right outlook. We have to get an idea of the unity within the manifold. We have to close our eyes and tell our mind that it is all in Brahman. It is Brahman that is manifesting as the material universe.

We see our body and this whole world, but we see that everything is gross. That is all right. Start from there, but bring this idea of Brahman. Our goal is to discover Brahman. We have to go step by step. Bhrigu practised this and gradually developed the power of unification.

The next step in the unification is prana, which is comprised of all forms of energy. The energies that are in our bloodstream are also in heat, light, and radiation. We encounter these energy fields all the time. Bring the idea of unity. God is manifest as prana. If we stretch our mind, let it be a rocket and go through this vast universe into space. Then again, make it go to the little world of the ants and bugs. We are trying to find God, so we have to expand our ideas.

When we reach what is described as the ultimate, we will see that it is nothing but Brahman. That faith has to be present. In Sanskrit it is called *shraddha*. That firm faith is what we need in everything we do. We have faith that the other drivers on the road will stay in their lanes. In every work in life, we need faith that our instructors are guiding us accurately. Somehow, in religion, we erroneously think that we do not need instruction and faith. But we do need a firm faith in the scriptures and in the teacher. That is called *shraddha*.

If we want the knowledge of Brahman, we

have to bring the idea that all life is coming from God. A spiritual seeker has to meditate on Brahman as prana, meditate on God as the source of cosmic energy.

Then Bhrigu meditated on Brahman as the mind. We encounter the mind all the time. Every living creature has a mind. Think of all these minds that have come in the past and will come in the future as one cosmic mind.

*Vijnana* is knowledge, *ahamkara*, the ego, and *buddhi*, the intellect; all together they comprise the *vijnanamaya kosha*, which combines the sense of agency and the sense of individuality that is necessary in order to live. 'I am the doer', this sense comes from God as the *vijnana*.

Finally, we come to *ananda*, bliss or pleasure; Brahman as joy. We enjoy bliss by eating or drinking or even by doing religious practices. Bring the power of unification to our enjoyment of bliss. Our bliss is very selective, so how can we say that bliss is everywhere? Again, faith has to be present. We enjoy seeing certain people, but others we hate. That is practical life. If we are trying to reach spiritual truth, we have to develop our mind so that we can have newer and newer likes. The scriptures say that the sages have experienced everything being permeated by Brahman manifested as *ananda*. In contemplation, we have to rise to where we can forget our likes and dislikes. We have to forget everything. If the idea of mind comes, we have to drown that idea of mind in *ananda*. Just as when a person has covered their body in many different layers of clothing, if prana, the life force, appears, we have to tell it, 'No, for me right now you are not prana, now you are *ananda*'.

Start with our own body and feel that this body is pervaded by bliss in the hair, in the hands, and in the feet. Feel that the air and space surrounding the body are pervaded by bliss, not the broken pieces of bliss. It was necessary to go

through those earlier gross practices. For example, a person is taking a walk and sees the flowers and feels naturally that everything is joyful. Then coming to the breakfast table there is a sort of joy. Let us feel that this light-hearted attitude is that same bliss. Remember the words of the sages, that everything is indeed bliss. If the face of our enemy comes, we have to tell our mind that it is all bliss. Just like if we are on a sailboat and there is no land in sight, it is all water. In that way the meditator must feel that everything is bliss no matter what idea is coming. We have to feel that it is all bliss. Everything that is happening is all bliss, infinite bliss.

All is bliss—that is the point of this meditation. Practise meditation on Brahman as bliss. After meditating on this, naturally the mind maintains some of this experience. When we come back to this everyday world, we will try to remember our experience. From day to day, the source of our likes and dislikes will be less and less. Our practical life changes gradually as we proceed in this meditation. When that meditation has become a permanent trait of our personality, we will see that our dislikes become feebler and feebler. Life will be more and more harmonious. Even though we do not feel joy with every person, the more we practice, the better our life will become.

We will find that as these changes come into our life, this world changes its colour. It depends upon the intensity of our meditation and how seriously we have been practising these ideas. We say that everything is coming from God. At this level we are looking on God as bliss. Any kind of joy that we experience comes from Brahman as joy. Remember that scale of joy in the previous chapter. A stage will come when our likes and dislikes will disappear. Read the lives of the saints like Sri Ramakrishna, who were always joyful. The tensions in our life will disappear because all

is really Brahman. It is because of our complexes that we cannot see Brahman. Our daily life can become full of love and compassion and devoid of animosities.

Bhrigu came to the realisation that Brahman is ananda. The ananda we can conceive of now is only a fragment of that infinite bliss. It cannot come when we have too much body consciousness and egoism. We need to foster the *sattvic* stage of the mind. The teacher tells us to practise those other meditations first. It depends upon the person about how much joy we are capable of and how *sattvic* our mind has become. Life can be a play of joy and death can also be a play of joy.

### **Class 16: Become Brahman**

Bhrigu wanted to know about Brahman and his father, who was his teacher, instructed him step by step from the gross to the finest. Instead of taking things in a piecemeal way, if we close our eyes and concentrate on the unity of this vast material universe, past the stars, all the way down through to the atomic world, the mind will become calm. That is called contemplation.

When we are too busy, we cannot perform contemplation. We must take some special time every day for contemplation. The true nature of Brahman will come to us when it is time, but right now our mind is not capable of understanding the vast unity. We are trying to understand spiritual truth. The physical universe does not mean just chemistry and the like. We must think in mystical, spiritual terms. It is all mysteries and riddles. Really speaking, this universe cannot be known in its reality with the discursive mind. We have to train the mind and the procedure has to be different. That is what Bhrigu's father was teaching his son.

First of all, we have to know that Brahman is the creator, the sustainer, and the dissolver of everything. The definition of Brahman is that

by which everything is created, sustained, and disappears. When we have faith in that, then we can begin this contemplation. The more we do this, the more the mind becomes calm. This contemplation is bound to strengthen our tranquillity, our harmony, and our peace. Even though we see the manifold, when the mind becomes pure and more receptive, then we can see that the unity is Brahman. Instead of trying to think that the vast material universe is operated by the forces of nature, we bring the idea of Brahman and think that it is Brahman appearing as this vast material universe. Gradually, Bhrigu stays on this contemplation on the material universe until it becomes a very full experience for him. Then he goes onward.

Meditation of matter as Brahman is elevating. Why? It is because we are thinking of unity. When we think of unity, there is bound to be a feeling of peace. For example, place ten one-dollar bills all over the table. After looking and looking at them, place them all in one pile and then see how the mind calms down.

The next exercise is to think on Brahman as prana, the life principle. Think of animate and inanimate beings and then try to think of the life principle within them all. It is in all the plants, the birds, and the bugs. With closed eyes, think of Brahman as prana. Think of that vast universe that appears as matter and then think of prana as it enters into some parts of matter, and life appears. In the beginning we think of prana in the dog and cat and the big tree and plants and also in us. We feel the pulsation of life. When unanalysed, our life seems like a confusion to us. Here we can think of our heart pulsation, our digestion, and breathing. Then we can extend this contemplation and meditate on the cosmic prana. Brahman is this prana, how wonderful!

Our next step is the mind. The mind is our common experience. We must separate the mind

from the body. What the mind is we do not know, but its workings are wonderful. There is the sense of the ego and our emotions. We think of our mind and our own personality. As we extend our thinking, we realise that wherever there is purposive behaviour, there is mind. Even with open eyes we can know that reality—everything as ideas. Mind is everywhere. As this contemplation matures, it is possible to see that, at every level, all that we perceive is mind. If we think of hair, the mind has to be there. The mind has really penetrated into every particle of this body. Everything is thought. Space is thought. Time is another thought. Many philosophies have been built on this idea, that everything is thought. For example, in dream we experience everything, but it is really only the mind. This is the third meditation, which brings the mind to a subtler stage of contemplation.

The fourth stage is the level of *vijnana*. Think of everything as a piece of knowledge; even the mind is a piece of knowledge. If we think of an apple—its colour, its taste—it is all pieces of knowledge. Think that everything is the light of knowledge. The world as mind and the world as knowledge are of course very close, but we have to separate them. If we can think of everything as knowledge, it raises our mind to a higher level.

When we were studying the five *koshas*, coverings of the Self, we came to the fourth wall, but we were only talking about thoughts that had become very clear so that they were pieces of knowledge. All the time our sense of 'I', the ego, is there. In the first stage, the 'I' was a doer who was fixing the food and eating as the enjoyer. We have to separate these functions. In this meditation the *vijnana* has been separated from the other parts of the mind. At this stage, think of millions of human beings. If we only think of 'me', the thoughts will get mixed up. There is purposive behaviour in all life. For example, look at

the wisteria vines trying to reach the statue of Sri Krishna in our retreat area.

Now we come to the fifth stage, joy. Our joy is handicapped by our likes and dislikes. If our mind could be free from likes and dislikes, we could experience more and more joy. Brahman is ananda. The joy of Brahman is everywhere but we cannot find it because we are still thinking of our own body, of our own family. We are afraid that we shall lose our pleasures, but that is wrong. If we can expand, the same joy will come from everywhere. We are so hungry for joy. We can do so much work for just a few minutes of joy.

At all levels of this universe there is joy. In this way, one has to contemplate on Brahman as ananda. This cosmic process is the thinking of Brahman. Everything is one homogeneous ananda. Everything is a fragment of that joy. This is in contemplation, but when we come back, if someone is scolding us, we can say, 'Oh the joy of scolding!' Even when terrible death is coming, we can say, 'Oh, sweet death!' If we can think that this heat on a summer's day is a mass of joy, this moustache is a mass of joy, this arm is a mass of joy, then we will really be loving our body. Think of the infinite space. There is a section of that vast space in this little body of ours. Think that all the thoughts of the mind are dancing in joy. Normally, when we move our hands and legs, there is no joy. If we watch the dancers in a ballet, there is joy in their movements. With this contemplation of Brahman, joy is everywhere. When we come back to this world, we are bound to feel wonderful. If we practise Brahman as bliss, then at every stage we are happy

because everywhere there is space as the joy of Brahman. All prana is the joy of Brahman.

These are the practices of meditation. As we can easily see, these practices are objective meditations. We are meditating on *saguna* Brahman. When the last practice, Brahman as ananda, has become mature, then we are ready for the last stage, *nirguna* Brahman. That stage cannot be objectively experienced. Up to now we have been meditating on God. Instead of meditating on some idea of God in heaven doing this and that, we are contemplating things that are in our daily experience. We have magnified them and our mind has become mature; it is free from passions and egotism. It is just like an advanced skier, who is ready for ski jumping. This stage comes by itself. That is Self-knowledge.

That infinite indescribable is our true Self. Our true Self has these five coverings, matter, prana, mind, knowledge, ananda, but inside there is our true Self. It is so majestic that we insult it if we try to think of it or try to think about it. It is even an insult to call it majestic. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, the teacher says the Self stands in its own majesty. Then he adds, 'No, it is more than that!' At the end of this chapter it says, Bhrigu practised the meditation of Brahman as ananda: 'Let him worship Brahman as Brahman, and he will become Brahman' (90).



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# BALABODHA

**Ancient Wisdom Made Easy**

## Prana

THE WORD ‘PRANA’ is a commonly used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The widely used meaning of the word ‘prana’ is vital energy, but it is necessary to see the other meanings and the origins of this word. This is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word ‘prana’ is derived from the root word *pra*, which means filling, fulfilling, like, and resembling. When the suffixes *an* and *ach* are added to *pra*, the word ‘prana’ is derived. ‘Prana’ means filled, full, the breath of life, breath, respiration, spirit, vitality, vital organ, vital air, air inhaled, wind, breath as a sign of strength, vigour, energy, power, breath as a measure of time, time necessary for the pronunciation of ten long syllables, the sixth day in the light half of Brahma’s month, Purusha in Sankhya philosophy, the spirit identified with the totality of dreaming spirits in Vedanta, poetical inspiration, myrrh, Brahma, the last part of something containing three parts, vital air of heart, consciousness differentiated by the subtle body, exhaling, liquid, ability, valour, bravery, boldness, quality, characteristic, state of mind, taste, fragrance, incense, rooted in, root, substance, earth, inanimate immovable object, Brahman, sound, voice, place of the sense organs, and smell.

Prana is divided into two major categories of *maha*, great and *alpa*, small. The number of pranas

is variously said to be, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen. Life remains as long as there is prana in the body. When prana leaves the body, death occurs. Prana is the dynamic force present in everything. The quantity and quality of prana within a living being changes continuously. Good thoughts, elevated emotions, and spiritual practices increase the levels of prana. When energy is taken away from the senses and channelised into positive endeavours, prana is conserved. Every thought and food has a different quality and quantity of prana. Even the air that we breathe, has different levels of prana, depending on the quality of air. However, prana is not just generated from external sources like air, food, and water, but can also be generated and refined by oneself. Prana can also generate more prana by itself.

The control of prana is called pranayama. By controlling prana, one can not only conserve it, but can reduce one’s dependence on it. Controlling prana makes the mind still and calm, and can lead to a steadiness of mind, where there are no thoughts.

Prana functions at two levels, the individual and the cosmic. When a person has completely controlled one’s individual prana and has attained a thoughtless state of mind, where effectively the mind ceases to exist, one can experience the cosmic prana. Then one becomes one with the cosmos and also realises one’s true nature, Brahman. This state is when the kundalini is awakened as kundalini is the same as cosmic prana. Such a state leads to one’s liberation from the transmigratory cycle of existence.



# TRADITIONAL TALES

## ***The Glory of the Gift of Food***

(Continued from the previous issue)

**J**UST BEFORE DAWN, Gunashila woke up from sleep and was surprised not to see the hunter. He then climbed down from the treehouse and continued his journey. At dawn, the hunter's wife learnt about her husband's death, guessed what had happened, and died in shock.

During his journey, Gunashila saw a physically challenged person standing in front of his hut, taking the support of his cane. That person asked Gunashila where he was going and what was his aim, and so on. Gunashila explained the reason for his journey. Hearing this, the physically challenged person said: 'Child! In that case, please do something for me. I do not get hungry at all. Please ask the reason for this from the goddess, whom you would be meditating upon.' Gunashila promised to do so.

On his journey further, he saw a cobra. The cobra asked Gunashila the reason for his journey. He gave the cobra the same reply he had given to the physically challenged person. Listening to it, the cobra said: 'Child! I am suffering because I cannot see. Please ask the goddess what I should do to be free from this misery.' Gunashila accepted the cobra's request. The cobra showed its dwelling place nearby.

On his journey further, Gunashila saw a mango tree full of luscious ripe mangoes. The tree prayed to Gunashila: 'All my fruits get infected by worms. That is why no one eats my mangoes. Please ask the goddess what I should do to prevent my mangoes from getting infected by worms, so that I can be beneficial to people by

giving them my good fruits. Please tell me the solution on your return.' Gunashila agreed to do so.

He reached the mountain peak near the forest. He sat there on a spot and practised severe austerities meditating on a goddess. Though he was a boy, he could practise those austerities because he had good tendencies. The austerities of that pure-minded boy did not go in vain. The goddess was pleased by Gunashila's austerities and appeared before him and said: 'Child! You can freely ask for whatever you want. I will grant whatever you ask.' Gunashila said: 'O Goddess! I do not want to ask anything for myself. I want to know the benefit of giving the gift of food.'

The goddess said: 'Son! I will arrange for you to yourself know the answer to your question. Your country's king would have a son after ten months at 5.30 a.m. You go to the king and ask him to first put his child on a golden plate. Then, you ask the child about the benefits of the gift of food. You will know about the results of the gift of food from the child's answer.'

Next, Gunashila asked the goddess the questions that the physically challenged person, the cobra, and the mango tree had requested him to ask, and got the answers. The goddess said: 'Please be free to ask whatever else you want.' Gunashila said that he did not want anything for himself. The goddess blessed him and vanished.

On his way home, the mango tree welcomed him, to which Gunashila told what the goddess had told him: 'O mango tree! You were a rich man in your previous birth. However, you did not use even an iota of your wealth for the

welfare of others and remained greedy till the end. You had converted your wealth into golden bricks and had buried them. The place where you had buried them is the exact spot where you stand as a mango tree now. Your mangoes are all worm-eaten because you did not use your wealth for the good of others.' The mango tree replied: 'I thank you profusely for enquiring this and telling me. Please accept all these gold bricks.'

The cobra welcomed Gunashila on the way, when he was returning with the golden bricks to his home. He told the cobra: 'O snake! You have a diamond with you. The goddess said that you will get eyesight, if you give that diamond to someone.' The cobra immediately spat out the diamond and said: 'If that be so, please accept this diamond yourself, as you have learnt the reason and told me.'

On his way, when Gunashila was going to his home with the golden bricks and the diamond, the physically challenged person welcomed him. Gunashila said to him: 'You have to teach your knowledge to others. The goddess said that you do not get hungry because you have failed to teach your knowledge to others.' The physically challenged person said: 'Is that so? I am highly grateful to you. I will teach my knowledge to you.' He thus taught his knowledge to Gunashila.

Gunashila reached the king's palace. He met the king and told him: 'O king! You will become the father of a son after ten months.' Gunashila gave the exact date and time with the other details that the goddess had told him. Hearing this, the king was amazed and became very happy. He made Gunashila a guest in the palace and gave him royal hospitality, till the birth of his son.

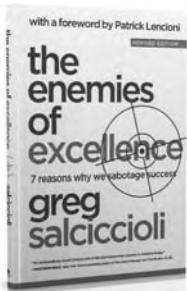
The appropriate hour arrived and the king called the attendants of the inner chamber of his palace, and asked them to first put the baby on a golden plate and bring him to the king. The attendants brought the baby on a golden plate. Gunashila asked the baby: 'O child! Please tell me the benefits of the gift of food.' By the goddess's grace, the child remembered his past birth and said: 'It was I who met you as a hunter in the forest. Since I had given you food then, now I have born as a prince. On the other hand, my wife who prevented me from giving you food has born as a pig of the gutter in this country.'

Knowing the greatness of the gift of food, Gunashila returned to his home. He described to his mother everything that had happened since the start of his journey. She became quite happy hearing the greatness of the gift of food, continued to live providing great hospitality to her guests, and attained a great merit on her death.



# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



## **The Enemies of Excellence: 7 Reasons Why We Sabotage Success**

Greg Salciccioli

Crossroad Publishing, 831, Chestnut Ridge Road, Spring Valley, NY 10977, USA. [www.crossroadpublishing.com](http://www.crossroadpublishing.com). 2014. \$19.95. viii + 104 pp. HB. ISBN 9780824526269.

Excelling is the goal of every endeavour. No one wants to be mediocre. Everyone wants to excel at what one does and reach the zenith of performance in that field. Very few can actually excel. Often the cause for not excelling is a general lack of discipline and a wrong understanding of the very parameters of excellence. Humility leads to excellence, both on the worldly and spiritual fronts. However, excellence eludes many because of the arrogance, latent or explicit, that one gains with one's wrong perception that one has gained some knowledge or skill. Essentially, the factors that disturb the mind become obstacles in achieving concentration on the task at hand, makes one deviate from one's goals, and leads to a disarray of discipline. Not only does the mind get disturbed, the whole personality of such a person is totally fragmented. People coming in contact with such a person are upset by the total disregard for sense that such a person exhibits. Finally, the person who was slated to be a leader ends up being a leader of a different kind, a leader of failure, a leader of all the don'ts that one should follow if one wants success in life.

This book carefully analyses seven reasons why we are unable to succeed. The author, Greg Salciccioli, uses the term 'We Sabotage Success'. His choice of words is quite poignant and pregnant with meaning. The clear idea that comes out of this usage of words is that it is the individual alone who is responsible for one's success. Success or

the lack of it does not depend on any other person or cause. It is our penchant to blame external factors for our failure. Salciccioli is clear that the truth is anything but that. He makes a scale of the risk levels of the enemies of excellence and divides them into three sections, low, medium, and high. Salciccioli tells us that the failure of leadership can be addressed, is difficult to be addressed, and almost impossible to control respectively, in these sections.

In his foreword, Patrick Lencioni says that when a leader or a great personality fails, she or he does not get sympathy. The reasons for this apathy are mainly that such a personality brings failure because of one's own doing and that people love to see a previously egotistic person become humble. There is also another reason that when a leader suffers failure, it is not restricted to one person but percolates to the lives of numerous others, who are connected to that leader and her or his organisation. However, as Lencioni points out, Salciccioli's theory states that 'there is something inherent in being a person of influence that creates a likelihood of pain and self-destruction' (viii).

The seven enemies of excellence, egotism, life mismanagement, bad habits, indulgence, broken relationships, isolation, and self-sabotage are discussed, each in a separate chapter. Salciccioli begins the book by warning against playing with matches. By 'matches', he means problem areas or areas known to create havoc. He also clarifies that the problems that leaders face are much like the problems non-leaders face. He likens these problems to fire and asks us to soon identify them and to pull away from them. He advises us to heed the warning signs, which he assures, are always present, because failures do not happen overnight.

Salciccioli's language is direct and lucid. Many of his near-poetic maxims are rightly italicised and serve to remind us of some cardinal truths.

For example, he says: 'Few people consider how to sustain their success because they're too busy trying to achieve it' (9). Or: 'Replace the energy you expire' (37). According to him, the first step in getting rid of the enemies of excellence is to identify the 'intrinsic dangers in leadership' (7). He asks us to identify our vulnerabilities in personal and professional lives. He then asks us to think of ways to address these vulnerabilities. The most important thing that matters is that we make the right choices. Salciccioli says: 'When we decide to do what's right, regardless of the outcome, we will always discover greater opportunity' (23). He cautions us against arrogance and asks us to seek help in tackling it. He asks us to find out the exact enemy of excellence that is creating problems for us the most. However, he says that sometimes the enemies might remain and yet one can be successful. He shows us ways to reduce the risks that such enemies pose to the possibility of success.

To counter the enemy of egotism, Salciccioli suggests that we develop altruism. He asks us to implement some altruistic best practices in our organisations and requests us to list our egotistical behaviours. According to him, evaluation, gaining insight, and initiating new behaviour are the three steps in getting rid of egotism. For tackling life mismanagement, he suggests that we take the steps of determining, planning, and practising priorities. Physical, emotional, and spiritual health are important in tackling this problem. For countering the enemy of bad habits, Salciccioli advises us to create good habits in the place of bad ones and live an intentional, purposeful life. He asks us to do this exercise with one's team, so that it would be easy to achieve the goal of completely getting rid of all bad habits.

The biggest hurdle in identifying the enemy of egotism is that most leaders who suffer from this problem, and there appear to be really many, are highly charismatic, articulate, capable, and usually know their way through their industry and society. Needless to say, they also control the bastions of power and very few people, if any, like to critique them for the fear of ruffling the wrong feathers. Leaders who are insufferably egotistic characteristically are highly reluctant to share power or control, much less heed to new ideas

and innovations. Salciccioli is quite confident that the most easy way to be free from the enemy of egotism is to develop a selfless altruistic outlook to work and life. When the mundane is tied upward-looking to an ideal, it becomes easier to inspire and integrate one's team members.

Why do we let the enemies of excellence destroy our lives? Salciccioli says that it is primarily because of three reasons, pride, lack of understanding, and lack of experience. He assures us that character is the best antidote for indulgence. 'The stronger it is, the greater defense it offers. The weaker it is, the more susceptible to sabotage we become' (60). Salciccioli tells us that the enemy of broken relationships is an emotionally and mentally exhausting enemy and he suggests that we should resurrect our broken relationships by analysing what we value in life and building our critical connections. The importance of emotional quotient, EQ, or emotional intelligence is stressed and Salciccioli says that we should be able to track our accountability on account of ethics, morals, emotions, relationships, money, recreation, and thoughts. This tracking of accountability should be done with a core group of people who would be honest and would have access to our full disclosure.

Salciccioli says that the enemy of self-sabotage begins with a great gap created between our public and private images. This arises because of self-deception that comes out of egotism, he says. Such self-deception manifests often in the form of seeking praise, postponing doing important tasks, developing bad habits, and so on. In effect, the enemy of self-sabotage could give birth to all the other six enemies of excellence.

Each chapter begins with learning outcomes and ends with coaching tips. Charts, diagrams, questionnaires, tables, and a listing of valuable resources make this book more like a workbook designed to enable any one to be free from the enemies of excellence. This book is an essential read for all leaders and other people, who influence numerous around them. A spiritual guide and a management book, this volume is sure to bring some sweeping changes to one's way of thinking.

*Editor*

Prabuddha Bharata

# MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.  
Extracts from a thought-provoking book every month.**

## **Bit By Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age**

Matthew J Salganik

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. 2018. xix + 423 pp. \$35. HB. ISBN 9780691158648.



**I**N THE SUMMER OF 2009, mobile phones were ringing all across Rwanda. In addition to the millions of calls from family, friends, and business associates, about 1,000 Rwandans received a call from Joshua Blumenstock and his colleagues. These researchers were studying wealth and poverty by conducting a survey of a random sample of people from a database of 1.5 million customers of Rwanda's largest mobile phone provider. Blumenstock and colleagues asked the randomly selected people if they wanted to participate in a survey, explained the nature of the research to them, and then asked a series of questions about their demographic, social, and economic characteristics.

Everything I have said so far makes this sound like a traditional social science survey. But what comes next is not traditional—at least not yet. In addition to the survey data, Blumenstock and colleagues also had the complete call records for all 1.5 million people. Combining these two sources of data, they used the survey data to train a machine learning model to predict a person's wealth based on their call records. Next, they used this model to estimate the wealth of all 1.5 million customers in the database. They also estimated the places of residence of all 1.5 million customers using geographic information embedded in the call records. Putting all

of this together—the estimated wealth and the estimated place of residence—they were able to produce high-resolution maps of the geographic distribution of wealth in Rwanda. In particular, they could produce an estimated wealth for each of Rwanda's 2,148 cells, the smallest administrative unit in the country.

It was impossible to validate these estimates because nobody had ever produced estimates for such small geographic areas in Rwanda. But when Blumenstock and colleagues aggregated their estimates to Rwanda's thirty districts, they found that these estimates were very similar to those from the Demographic and Health Survey, which is widely considered to be the gold standard of surveys in developing countries. Although these two approaches produced similar estimates in this case, the approach of Blumenstock and colleagues was about ten times faster and fifty times cheaper than the traditional Demographic and Health Surveys. These dramatically faster and cheaper estimates create new possibilities for researchers, governments, and companies.

This study is kind of like a Rorschach inkblot test: what people see depends on their background. Many *social scientists* see a new measurement tool that can be used to test theories about economic development. Many *data scientists* see a cool new machine learning

problem. Many *business people* see a powerful approach for unlocking value in the big data that they have already collected. Many *privacy advocates* see a scary reminder that we live in a time of mass surveillance. And finally, many *policy makers* see a way that new technology can help create a better world. In fact, this study is all of those things, and because it has this mix of characteristics, I see it as a window into the future of social research.

The central premise of this book is that the digital age creates new opportunities for social research. Researchers can now observe behavior, ask questions, run experiments, and collaborate in ways that were simply impossible in the recent past. Along with these new opportunities come new risks: researchers can now harm people in ways that were impossible in the recent past. The source of these opportunities and risks is the transition from the analog age to the digital age. This transition has not happened all at once—like a light switch turning on—and, in fact, it is not yet complete. However, we've seen enough by now to know that something big is going on.

One way to notice this transition is to look for changes in your daily life. Many things in your life that used to be analog are now digital. Maybe you used to use a camera with film, but now you use a digital camera (which is probably part of your smart phone). Maybe you used to read a physical newspaper, but now you read an online newspaper. Maybe you used to pay for things with cash, but now you pay with a credit card. In each case, the change from analog to digital means that more data about you are being captured and stored digitally.

In fact, when looked at in aggregate, the effects of the transition are astonishing. The amount of information is stored digitally, which facilitates analysis, transmission, and merging. All of this digital information has come to be called ‘big

data’. In addition to this explosion of digital data, there is a parallel growth in our access to computing power. These trends—increasing amounts of digital data and increasing use of computing—are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

For the purposes of social research, I think the most important feature of the digital age is *computers everywhere*. Beginning as room-sized machines that were available only to governments and big companies, computers have been shrinking in size and increasing in ubiquity. Each decade since the 1980s has seen a new kind of computing emerge: personal computers, laptops, smart phones, and now embedded processors in the ‘Internet of Things’ (i.e., computers inside of devices such as cars, watches, and thermostats). Increasingly, these ubiquitous computers do more than just calculate: they also sense, store, and transmit information.

For researchers, the implications of the presence of computers everywhere are easiest to see online, an environment that is fully measured and amenable to experimentation. For example, an online store can easily collect incredibly precise data about the shopping patterns of millions of customers. Further, it can easily randomize groups of customers to receive different shopping experiences. This ability to randomize on top of tracking means that online stores can constantly run randomized controlled experiments. In fact, if you've ever bought anything from an online store, your behavior has been tracked and you've almost certainly been a participant in an experiment, whether you knew it or not.

This fully measured, fully randomizable world is not just happening online; it is increasingly happening everywhere. Physical stores already collect extremely detailed purchase data, and they are developing infrastructure to monitor customers' shopping behavior and mix experimentation into routine business practice.



# REPORTS

## **Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita**

The following centres conducted the programmes mentioned against their names: **Asansol**: (i) Cultural competitions, 1,412 students from 11 schools took part; winners were awarded on 22 February 2018, attended by about 600 students. (ii) A discourse by Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 24 March attended by nearly 600 devotees. **Bagda**: A students' convention on 24 March, about 250 students and teachers, mainly from tribal communities, took part. **Gadadhar Ashrama**: Two students' conventions on 27 and 28 February at two schools in Hooghly district, attended by about 600 students. **Kailashahar**: A devotees' convention on 19 March, about 600 people participated. **Karimganj**: A devotees' convention on 18 February and a youths' convention on 24 February, 517 people participated. **Pala**: A students' convention on 12 March, 102 college students took part. **Purulia**: A youths' conference, held in association with the Higher Education Department, Government of West Bengal, at Purulia town on 23 March, which was presided over by Swami Suvirananda and attended by about 700 youths. **Rajkot**: A spiritual retreat on 11 March, a youths' convention on 20 March, and a lecture on 26 March, about 2,000 people attended. **Ramharipur**: A volleyball tournament on 3 and 4 March, 16 teams participated, and a teachers' convention on 4 March, attended by 243 teachers from 65 schools. **Saradapitha**: An international seminar at Vidyamandira (Arts and Science college under Saradapitha) on Sister Nivedita on 10 and 11 March, attended by about 400 people. Swami Suvirananda delivered the keynote address in the seminar. **Swamiji's**



*Inauguration of Telemedicine Service, Vrindaban*

**Ancestral House**: Five lectures at the centre and elsewhere in Kolkata between 27 February and 16 March, 2,680 people attended. **Tamluk**: Cultural competitions at 26 schools in Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur districts, about 6,500 students took part. The final round of the competitions and the prize-giving ceremony, attended by about 500 people, were held at the Ashrama on 22 March.

## **News of Branch Centres**

Vivek Institute of Excellence, an institute to conduct life-enhancing courses and programmes, at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Visakhapatnam** was inaugurated on 1 March.

Telemedicine service and two mobile medical vans were launched at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban** on 5 March.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Aurangabad** held a medical camp and an exhibition on Swamiji from 7 to 9 March at Paithan of Aurangabad District, the birthplace of Sant Eknath, on the occasion of Nath Shashthi Mela. In all, 3,947 patients were treated in the medical camp.

Swami Suvirananda inaugurated the renovated Vivekananda Park at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Asansol** on 24 March in the presence of Moloy Ghatak, Minister-in-charge, Law and Judicial Departments, Government of West Bengal.

**Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Ashrama, Raipur** celebrated its golden jubilee with a day-long programme comprising a public meeting and cultural events on 25 March.

Srimat Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the multi-therapy

dispensary building at **Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur** on 25 March. Sri Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways and Shipping, Government of India, and some other dignitaries spoke in the public meeting attended by about 1,000 people.

An assistant professor of Chemistry in **Vidya-mandira, Saradapitha** was awarded Young Scientist Award 2017 by the Indian Chemical Society, Kolkata.

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, Bangladesh**, held the concluding phase of its year-long centenary celebration from 26 February to 3 March with special worship, public meetings, conventions for youths, women and devotees, and cultural programmes. Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, Home Minister, Government of Bangladesh, inaugurated the programmes and Swami Suvirananda presided over the inaugural function. Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; Biren Sikder, Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of Bangladesh; and many monks and hundreds of devotees participated in the celebration.

### **Values Education and Youth Programmes**

**Delhi** centre held 16 values education workshops between 2 February and 27 March, which were attended by 1,339 teachers and principals. The workshops were held in Delhi, Ernakulam, Gwalior, Hyderabad, Mysuru, and Ranchi.

**Gurap** centre held a youths' convention on 28 February in which about 500 students took part.

### **Relief**

**Winter Relief:** The following centres distributed blankets and winter wear, shown against their names, to needy people: **India: Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata:** 219 blankets from 20 August

to 24 December. **Baranagar Math:** 350 blankets from 29 October to 31 January. **Barasat:** 315 blankets from 3 to 26 December. **Belagavi:** 300 blankets on 10 and 20 December. **Deoghar:** 1,218 blazers, 357 jackets, 216 sweaters, and 190 sweatshirts from 2 to 21 January. **Garbeta:** 200 blankets, 443 jackets, 700 sweaters, and 870 sweatshirts from 30 September to 31 December. **Gourhati:** 300 blankets from 6 November to 14 January. **Gwalior:** 150 blankets on 17 and 19 December. **Jamshedpur:** 500 blankets, 1,030 sweaters, and 3,449 jackets from 16 October to 4 February. **Jayrambati:** 3,000 blankets from 26 December to 14 January. **Kailashahar:** 300 blankets from 9 to 31 December. **Kanpur:** 162 blankets and 3,312 sweatshirts from 5 December to 26 January. **Khetri:** 1,042 sweaters, 1,171 sweatshirts, and 3,104 jackets from 3 November to 20 February. **Koalpara** (sub-centre of Jayrambati Ashrama): 600 blankets from 10 to 23 November. **Lalgarh:** 300 blankets, 1,040 sweaters, 900 sweatshirts, and 250 jackets from 22 September to 12 February. **Lucknow:** 100 blankets on 12 February. **Malda:** 1,159 blankets, 324 woollen caps, and 50 assorted woollen garments from 3 November to 14 February. **Mekhliganj:** 100 blankets and 100 sweaters from 7 to 20 December. **Ponnampet:** 1,000 blankets from 26 June to 11 December. **Puri Mission:** 800 blankets from 1 November to 17 February. **Ranchi Morabadi:** 2,534 sweaters, 440 sweatshirts, 1,843 jackets, and 847 blazers from 21 December to 12 February. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** 300 blankets on 17 and 20 December. **Varanasi Home of Service:** 422 blankets from 26 January to 7 February. **Bangladesh: Dhaka:** 500 blankets from 10 to 25 January. **Dinajpur:** 1,050 blankets from 19 December to 5 February.

**Cyclone Ockhi Rehabilitation: Tamil Nadu: Chennai Math** distributed 5,170 asbestos sheets and 1,480 roof tiles among 620 cyclone-affected families from 15 January to 15 February. 

# Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama

Swami Vivekananda Path, P.O. Bela, Muzaffarpur-842002, Bihar, Phone: 0621-2272127, 2272963  
 E-mail: <rkm.muzaffarpur@gmail.com>, <muzaffarpur@rkmim.tog>

## Appeal

### **Introduction:**

Established in the Year 1926, Eye Infirmary started with the financial aid of British Governor, Lord Rutherford in the year 1947. Affiliated to RamaKrishna Math and RamaKrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal in July 2003.

### **Our Vision:**

Specialty in Eye, ENT, Dental, OPD for other departments, Diagnostics, Paramedical Training.

### **Service Rendered (2017 – 18) :**

**Medical:** Total OPD -95,628 Patients (Eye-45943, Allopathy-11540, Dental-3876, Homeopathy-34275); Pathology-3,692; Total Surgery-4,972 (Cataract Free-2858, Cataract Part Free-1968, & Others-146), Mobile Ophthalmic Van to reach out to villages,

**Disaster Management:** Flood Relief-Cooked food to 625 families, Winter Relief: Blankets to -300 Beneficiaries, Distress Relief: Readymade Dress to 2147 Beneficiaries.

**Non Formal Education:** GAP-100 Students, VSPP-75 Students, Balak Sangh-70 Students, Computer Awareness Training-27 Students, Free Coaching-35 Students, Study Circle-55 Meetings, Tailoring & Embroidery-40 Women.

**Required** - keeping in mind the immense potentiality of services in North Bihar Districts we require the following:

Rs. 11 Crore for construction of Ancillary Medical unit for Camp Patient's Stay, Doctor's Quarters, Paramedical Training Institute, Library, Auditorium and Office.

Rs. 3 Crore for Equipments and Machinery.

Rs.15 Lakh for Maintainence of old buildings, walls, road.

Rs.10 Lakh for Educational Programmes, Puja and Celebration for the year 2018-19.



Vivekananda Netralaya



Recovery Unit



Mobile Ophthalmic Van



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With your unanimous support throughout we have started reaching out to the poor patients of North Bihar Districts by giving quality free treatment. It is our humble request to you to come forward and donate to make our mission a successful one.

Kindly send your contribution by Cheque/DD or by NEFT/ RTGS to A/c No. **10877071752 IFS Code: SBIN0006016** in favour of **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Muzaffarpur**. Any contribution made in favour of "Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Muzaffarpur." is exempted from Income Tax u/s 80G of IT Act 1961.

**Swami Bhavatmananda  
Secretary**



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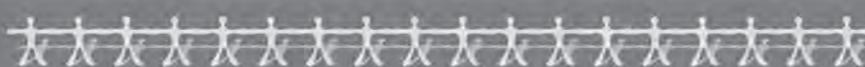
Hospitality



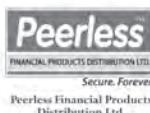
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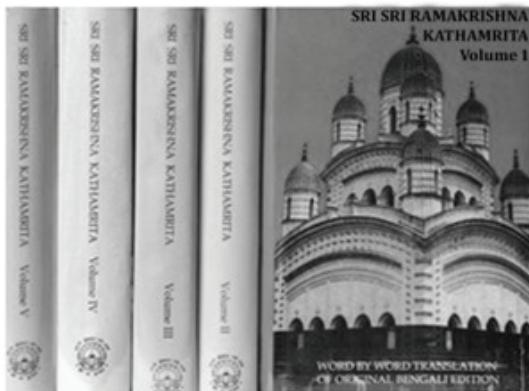
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**VOLUMES I to V**  
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 M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta), a son of the Lord and disciple, elaborated his diaries in five parts of 'Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita' in Bengali that were first published by Kathamrita Bhawan, Calcutta in the years 1902, 1905, 1908, 1910 and 1932 respectively. This series is a verbatim translation in Hindi of the same.
- **Sri Ma Darshan Vol. I to XVI** Rs. 900 per set (plus postage Rs. 150)  
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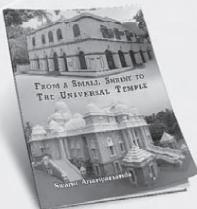


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# An Appeal

Dear Devotees & Well-wishers,

We all know that **Tirtharaj Prayag (Allahabad)** is a place for versatility of religions and spirituality. Not only different sects of the Hindu Dharma, but also people of all religion and faith come to Prayag to feel the gigantic vibrations penetrating the very spiritual atmosphere of Tirtharaj Prayag. One can see confluence of religions during the time of **Kumbha Mela**, which is a sort of a mini **India**. By the grace of spiritual teachers from time immemorial, pious devotees come to **Kumbha Mela** to take dip in the Triveni Sangam— and be sanctified. The upcoming **Kumbha Mela** is scheduled from 14 January to 19 February 2019. Per Government estimates, more than 15 crore sadhus, devotees and pilgrims will take bath in the holy water during the Mela.



Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad, will take this opportunity to extend its helping hand of service among more than five lakh Sadhus, Devotees and Pilgrims from the remotest corners of the country. This will be a unique opportunity for us to spread the message of the Holy Trio among devotees — and receive blessings by fulfilling the dream of Swamiji: "Service to Man is Service to God." With the blessings of the Most Revered **Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj** (the founder of Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad in the year 1910), we are planning to organise a camp in the bank of Triveni Sangam.

During the Mela days, the following facilities will be provided to devotees/pilgrims:

- ❖ Prayer cum lecture hall
- ❖ Round-the-clock free charitable dispensary with emergency facilities
- ❖ Book stall
- ❖ Photo gallery of the Holy Trio
- ❖ Boarding/lodging facilities for Sadhus, devotees and pilgrims.

The expected cost of this Kumbha Mela Camp is calculated at approx. Rs 1,50,00,000(Rupees one crore and fifty lakh only). To meet such high expense we request to you and other generous devotees to contribute and help us in our good work — as well as be a member in the **SevaYajna** started by **Swami Vivekananda** himself.

Your kind donation will be gladly accepted and acknowledged which may be either A/C payee Cheque / Draft in favour of 'Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama— Allahabad' or by Bank Transfer(NEFT/RTGS) on State Bank of India, Allahabad, A/C no: 10210448619, IFSC: SBIN0002584 . All the donations are exempt from Income Tax under Section 80G(5)(vi) of Income tax Act, 1961. Please send your Pan No: along with your Donation. Our PAN No is AAAARIO77P.

Hope all of you will grab this unique opportunity by helping us to make our Mission successful.



**Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama**  
Vijnanananda Marg, Mutthiganj, Allahabad -211 003  
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Swami Akshayananda  
Secretary



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you, have nothing to do with it.  
—Swami Vivekananda



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